

► NEW VCR REVIEWS/'UNTOUCHABLES' ON TAPE ◀

# Video Review™

THE  
WORLD  
AUTHORITY  
ON HOME  
VIDEO

MAY 1988

08876 \$1.95



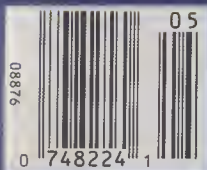
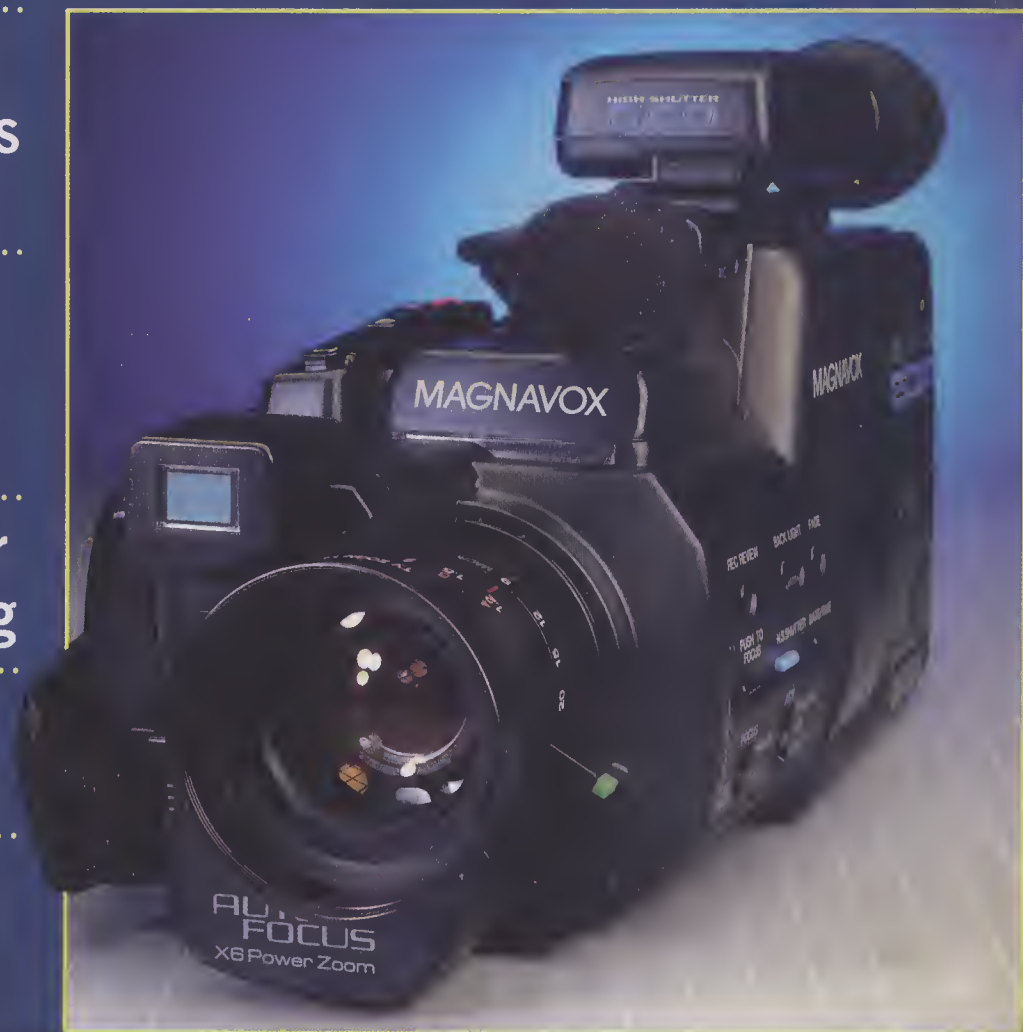
## CAMCORDERS How To Pick A Winner

► .....  
Complete Guide  
To Latest Models  
And All Formats  
► .....

► .....  
Top Directors'  
Home Shooting  
Techniques  
► .....

► .....  
Exclusive: Super  
Minicam Coming  
► .....

► .....  
1st Test: RCA's  
Big Screen TV  
► .....



# **TDK HAS THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES.**

## **ANY QUESTIONS?**

**Super VHS and DAT are the newest stars in video and audio tape recording. But these new technologies require a new generation of hardware and tapes.**

**And that inevitably brings up new questions from your customers. That's where TDK can help. When it comes to state-of-the-art recording technology, we have the answers.**

### **Q. WHAT IS DAT?**

**A.** DAT, short for Digital Audio Tape, is one of the most significant achievements in recent magnetic recording history, representing the collective engineering of the world's leading audio hardware and tape manufacturers. In a sophisticated ultra-compact cassette (about half the size of the analog audio cassette) DAT provides up to 2 hours (4 hours in EP mode) of uninterrupted digital recording with specs that equal the performance characteristics of professional studio digital recorders.

### **Q. DOES THE DAT SYSTEM MEAN I'M LIMITED TO RECORDING DIGITAL SOURCES?**

**A.** Not at all. There is a significant improvement in sound reproduction when recording from your analog library of LPs and tapes. However, DAT's sophisticated recording technology will be fully realized when using today's highest quality digital sources.

### **Q. HOW GOOD IS DAT?**

**A.** You'll have to hear DAT to believe how good the sound can be. The quality is comparable to Compact Discs. Frequency response is flat from 2 to 22,000Hz. Dynamic range is an incredible 96dB over the entire audio band. Hiss and modulation noise, wow and flutter, and distortion are essentially nonexistent. That means whatever you record suffers virtually no degradation in signal quality when played back. In addition, its unique transport system allows extremely fast track-to-track scanning and rewind time.

### **Q. HOW CAN DAT DO IT ALL IN SUCH A SMALL PACKAGE?**

**A.** Achieving the required recording density of 3 million bits per second using a tape only 3.81mm wide is no easy feat. The tape is withdrawn from the cassette housing and threaded around a rotating head drum—a technique similar to that used in VCRs. Typical DAT mechanisms use a 30mm diameter drum rotating at 2,000 RPM with the tape contacting a quarter of its circumference. The tracks laid down by the rotating heads are narrower than the width of a human hair!

### **Q. WHAT HAPPENS IF A TAPE DROPOUT OCCURS?**

**A.** In addition to extremely tight cassette and deck mechanism tolerances, DAT relies on a highly sophisticated error correction system. Most data losses which might be encountered are reconstructed by the built-in hardware circuitry.

### **Q. DOES THIS MEAN I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE QUALITY OF TAPE I USE?**

**A.** To the contrary. As with any other recording system—audio, video, or data—using inferior magnetic media is just asking for trouble. For over a decade, TDK has pioneered the development of metal particle technology, Super Finavinx, which has become an IEC standard for Type IV audio cassettes. In addition, TDK's experience with precision cassette mechanisms and shell construction helped accelerate the development of the DAT system. So, instead of depending on your DAT hardware's correction circuitry, **you can count on the dependability and reliability of TDK's DAT cassettes.**



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**Q. WHAT IS SUPER VHS?**

**A.** Super VHS, or S-VHS for short, is the latest generation of VHS. With 425 lines of horizontal resolution (nearly double the 240-line capability of standard VHS) it delivers dramatic improvements in color and clarity.

**Q. IS SUPER VHS COMPATIBLE WITH STANDARD VHS?**

**A.** Yes and no. Because Super VHS uses a higher frequency band to record the video signals, Super VHS recordings made on the new VCRs cannot be played on conventional VHS VCRs. Conventional VHS tapes, however, can be recorded, played, and freely interchanged between Super VHS and conventional VHS equipment.



**Q. WHAT DO I NEED TO ENJOY THE FULL BENEFIT OF SUPER VHS?**

**A.** You'll need a Super VHS VCR, a high-quality video monitor preferably equipped with an S-Video (or Y/C) connector, and, for live taping, a Super VHS camcorder. You'll, of course, also need a supply of Super VHS cassettes.

**Q. CAN I GET THE SAME RESULTS WITH MY CONVENTIONAL TV?**

**A.** You *can* use Super VHS VCRs with conventional TVs and camcorders that don't have S-Video connectors, but the resolution will be limited to the specifications of the TV or camcorder.

**Q. WHAT IS S-VIDEO, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

**A.** S-Video is one of the ways Super VHS achieves its superior performance. S-Video cables and connectors separate the luminance and chrominance components of the video signal, which are normally combined in conventional video connections. This eliminates interference (noise) and provides cleaner, truer color pictures and greater audio fidelity.

**Q. WILL I NOTICE A DIFFERENCE IN PICTURE QUALITY WHEN I USE SUPER VHS TO TAPE BROADCASTS?**

**A.** Yes. The incoming TV broadcast signal is higher in horizontal resolution (336 lines) than conventional VHS recording. The difference you see will, of course, depend on the resolution ability of your television set or monitor. You'll see the greatest improvement when taping "live" with a Super VHS camera or camcorder because this equipment takes full advantage of Super VHS's 425-line resolution capability.

**Q. WHY DO I HAVE TO USE SUPER VHS CASSETTES IN ORDER TO MAKE SUPER VHS RECORDINGS?**

**A.** Super VHS video tape must meet short wavelength recording requirements: high output, high frequency response, and an extremely smooth tape surface, just to name a few. TDK Super VHS XP, available in VHS and VHS-C formats, utilizes an ultra-fine Super Avilyn formulation possessing all the magnetic and physical properties needed for high-quality Super VHS recording. For professional-quality performance, reliability, and durability, you need look no further than TDK XP.

# THE ART OF PERFORMANCE

For more information about these products, call 1-800-TDK-TAPE  
For additional information, circle No. 3 on Reader Service Card.

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Cover Photo: Ed Gallucci.



# Baby BOOM

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—SISKEL & EBERT

UNITED ARTISTS PRESENTS  
DIANE KEATON in

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HAROLD RAMIS · SAM WANAMAKER and SAM SHEPARD as JEFF COOPER  
MUSIC BY BILL CONTI · Director of Photography WILLIAM A. FRAKER, A.S.C.

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Produced by NANCY MEYERS Directed by CHARLES SHYER

**PG**

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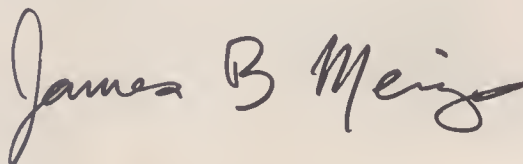
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## Shoot to Thrill

Suddenly, I have a whole new appreciation for the camcorder. I've always enjoyed shooting movies and trying out the latest models, but just recently owning a camcorder became a vital necessity for me. In fact, I can pinpoint the date: December 21, 1987, the day my son Benjamin was born. Like millions of new parents, I'm determined not to let a single milestone in his life pass without catching it on tape. Of course, a 20-minute scene of Benjy in his crib might not rank with *Gone with the Wind*, but for my family—especially his grandparents—it's pure magic.

That's what's great about home movies: They don't have to be brilliant, they just have to be *yours*. When I was a kid, my dad brought along an 8mm moviecamera on every vacation, and we did the same stupid things all kids do when someone points a camera at them: clown around and wave. Watching those silly movies is still one of my best memories of childhood. But home movies don't have to be klutzy to work. In "Tips from the Big Chair," on page 26, Glenn Kenny unveils practical shooting techniques from some of today's top movie directors. While following the tips of directors like Albert Brooks and Susan Seidelman may not make your movies look like big-budget Hollywood productions, at least they'll look better than my dad's.

The Electronic Industries Association tells us that about 1.6 million people bought camcorders in the US last year, and we expect that close to 2 million will be sold this year. Unfortunately, while camcorder features and performance have made real strides, format confusion afflicts the camcorder market now more than ever. Camcorder buyers face a total of six different—and often incompatible—formats to choose from. And those who already own camcorders may wonder whether the format they now have will still be around when they want to play back their tapes at some time in the future. Whether you're confused, nervous or just curious, Greg Fagan leads the way through the camcorder maze in his comparative survey, "The Format Wars," on page 21.



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## Beta Boosters Have Their Say



*Dirty Dancing's Cynthia Rhodes, Jennifer Grey, Patrick Swayze: a writer's misstep?*

### BETA BASHERS BEWARE

In the "Letters" section of the March issue of *VR*, E.G. Wilson boasts about the emergence of VHS owners as "the clear winners" in what he/she terms "this silly debate." Unfortunately for the seven to 20 million (depending on the source you read) Beta owners in the US, the fate of the format is anything but a "silly debate."

The truth is that the average buyer wants an inexpensive, reliable machine on which to play readily available rental movies and occasionally record a program. Popularity and the advent of Super VHS have nothing to do with VHS's "victory," and anyone who thinks otherwise had best think twice.

R.P. Fitzgerald  
Havertown, PA

I took it as a personal slap in the face that *Video Review*—a so-called "unbiased" publication—would even consider printing E.G. Wilson's letter. By printing it, you apparently feel that all Beta owners are "soft in the head." So what else is new? You never have had much use for Beta.

Robby Ray Rakestraw  
Willow Springs, MO

• *We've said it before, we'll say it again; we don't take sides. But as for VR not having "much use for Beta," we beg to differ. Perhaps you missed the Special Report on ED Beta in our February '88 issue or our world exclusive lab test of the newest Beta incarnation in April.* —Ed.

E.G. Wilson's statement that VHS owners have emerged as the clear winners may be true—for the moment. It will take time, but

with read-write laser discs and HDTV on the horizon, VHS will eventually end up as one big addition to the techno scrapheap. Those snickering at the decline and fall of Beta might as well laugh while they can, because no format is forever, including King VHS.

Chris A. Hussey  
Columbus, OH

No reason exists for Beta owners to admit they've chosen the wrong format, especially when the problem actually lies with the uneducated consumer who failed to choose the right one.

So yes, E.G. Wilson, it would appear that VHS is the winner and the consumer the loser, but not even the crystal-clear image quality of a Beta deck could show me the value of your prize.

Skip M. Plonka  
Westmont, IL

### 'JAP' NO JOKE

I was most disturbed by Jim Farber's review of *Dirty Dancing* (Feb. '88 *VR*). My concern is not with the movie or the substance of the review; I found the author's use of the derogatory term "JAP" (an acronym for "Jewish American Princess") to be extremely offensive to Jews in general

*Selected correspondence addressed to Video Review, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010, is printed in the "Letters" section, space permitting. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.*

and to Jewish women in particular.

I must say, in all fairness, that I believe Mr. Farber probably used this term naively, without fully understanding its implications. Regardless, that does not alter the fact that it helps to perpetuate an ugly and dangerous stereotype that has no place in a responsible publication.

R. Curtis  
Fayetteville, NY

### F/X AFFECTS

Really enjoyed the article "F/X" on special effects for home movies (Feb. '88 *VR*). Please do more on this subject. I'm not pleased with most lettering I've seen from the average title generator. How about an article on title generators and computer software for titling?

John Parker  
East Ridge, TN

• *Hold on, it's coming.*

—Ed.

The article "F/X" by Glenn Kenny was just what I needed, though I am still confused by all the available black boxes. I'd like to add editing, wipes and fades and audio mixing to the basic titling I already have. Please recommend some equipment for my needs within a moderate budget.

E.G. Smith  
Nashville, TN

• *While we cannot recommend products per se, there are a couple of processors that'll give you what you're looking for in one package. Sansui's AV-99 (\$650) and Sony's XV-C700 (about \$700) both have all the features you mention and provide enough options to get your creative juices flowing. For a more complete listing of recent additions to the processor field, see our April '88 Buyer's Guide Update.* —Ed.

### FOX HUNT

What's the story on the picture of Samantha Fox on page 58 of the Feb. '88 issue (in the "Equipment Previews" section)? Is it good news? Is there a home video featuring the lady coming soon on this side of the pond? (I believe there's one on the other side.) Or is it just a small tribute to her from whoever puts those pictures on the TV screens?

Robert Stockman  
St. Petersburg, FL

• *Just a tribute.*

—Ed.

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Oscar and Tony-Award winner ELLEN BURSTYN ("The Exorcist", "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore"), stars in this chilling story, as the Canadian mother of a college student who vanishes mysteriously while driving back to school in the states.

Desperate to find her son, Burstyn reports his strange disappearance to the police, only to be told they can do nothing for thirty days, until he is officially listed as missing. Stone-walled by the FBI and other authorities, her faith and determination won't let her give up the search for the truth.

Brian's van finally turns up in Portland, Maine, with Texas license plates. A man with a questionable criminal record is found in possession of the van and becomes a suspect, when arrested on another charge. When interrogated, the man claims the van was given to him and that he's never seen Brian. Incredulous at the man's story and outraged at the failure of the legal system to track her son, Burstyn enlists the help of a private detective (ROBERT PROSKY of "Hill Street Blues"). Their tenacious pursuit of clues uncovers the grim details of Brian's fate, leading to a shocking climax.

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## BAD TAPE BLUES

I read with great interest and concern the article "Caution: This Tape May Be Hazardous to Your VCR" by David Hajdu (March '88 *VR*). I *always* rent movies from my local video store and, luckily, I haven't had any of the problems described in the story. I try to rent a movie as soon as the store gets it in; that way I'm sure of getting a clean, clear copy.

Doug Boughton  
San Diego, CA

Your article on bad videotapes was an eye-opener.

I rented a copy of *Roxanne* from a local video store for \$2.66. The only thing I saw on the tape was the FBI warning. My VCR had

been trashed—no more audio or video. When I returned the tape and explained what had happened, I was not charged for the rental of the tape, but it cost me \$58.65 to have the VCR repaired.

I think one solution to the problem is to have two VCRs—one for rental tapes only, the other for tapes you make or buy.

Howard H. Hipkinds  
Walnut Creek, CA

Thank you for the hazardous-tape article. I found it very informative, and I'm sure it will help a lot of people. I would like to add a couple of other points that could be of service.

1) Tapes should have the VHS or Beta logo embossed on the casing. If you don't

see the logo, avoid that cassette.

2) If the movie label is typed, handwritten or not properly affixed, it's most likely an illegal copy.

Jesus Lopez  
Miami, FL

## CORRECTION

In last month's Lab Measurements chart for Sony's EDV-9000 ED Beta VCR, the numbers for Hi-Fi channel separation were erroneously listed as percentages. The listing should have read: 73.2/76.1 dB and 83.5/76.5 dB.

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## MARCHING INTO VIDEO STORES IN JUNE

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## Rich Kids, Poor Kids And the '75 World Series

### LOVELY WAR

I have searched both sides of the Atlantic for the 1969 British movie *Oh! What a Lovely War*, but nobody can locate it. Can you advise me on where to find it?

Horst N. Bertram  
Lebanon, PA

Sorry, our sources indicate that this Richard Attenborough (*Gandhi*, *Cry Freedom*) directorial debut is not available on video. It has, however, popped up on cable in the recent past, so check listings—perhaps it'll turn up again sometime soon.



Opulence and opposition in Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War*.

### PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT

I've been trying for many years to locate a funny, funny movie that Richard Benjamin starred in. It's called *Portnoy's Complaint*.

D. Ricci  
Anaheim, CA

The 1972 adaptation of Philip Roth's bestseller, directed by noted screenwriter Ernest Lehman (*North by Northwest*, *The Sound of Music*), is out on tape from Warner Home Video. If your local store can't help you obtain it, contact Commtron (Warner's distributor in your area) at 3211 W. MacArthur, Santa Ana, CA 92074, or call (714) 751-9011.

### CREATURE

Is *Creature from Black Lake* available on video?

Warren Thompson  
Redwood City, CA

It sure is. This 1976 Bigfoot adventure, starring the always amusing Jack Elam, is available on videocassette from Lightning Video. You can order it by mail by sending

\$59.98 (plus \$3 shipping and handling) to Invision, 60 Long Ridge Rd., Stamford, CT 06907. Specify VHS or Beta and allow three weeks for delivery.

### PIXOTE

Can you help me find the Brazilian movie *Pixote*, about abandoned children who turn to crime for survival?

Reginald Landers  
Detroit, MI

Hector Babenco (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Ironweed*) directed this 1981

home video. However, the people at New York City's New Video say they have some copies. To order by phone, give them a call at (212) 475-7400.



*Pixote* punks promote peril.

### 1975 WORLD SERIES

I have been looking everywhere for a highlights video of the 1975 World Series between the Reds and the Red Sox. Could you please help me?

Will Blount  
Livingston, AL

Well, slugger, for a free catalog of video highlights of all the championship games of the past 45 years, write to Major League Baseball Productions' Home Video Library, 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. The catalog includes postpaid prices and ordering information.

### JACQUES COUSTEAU

I know that Jacques Cousteau has made many underwater programs that have been released on video, but I'm looking for the series known as *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. Is that series available on home video, and if so, where can I find it?

Gregory S. Rose  
Negaunee, MI

Pacific Arts Video distributes 10 episodes of the series: "The Desert Whales," "The Dragons of Galapagos," "The Flight of Penguins," "The Forgotten Mermaids," "Octopus, Octopus," "The Singing Whale," "The Smile of the Walrus," "A Sound of Dolphins," "The Unsinkable Sea Otter" and "Whales." All of these 60-minute shows are narrated by Rod Serling, to boot. If your local video store is unable to obtain the tapes from its distributors, write to Pacific Arts, 50 N. La Cienega Blvd., Suite 201, Beverly Hills, CA 90211.

drama, which was originally available from RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video but has since been discontinued. Facets Multimedia Inc. rents (but does not sell) the tape by mail; to find out about its rental policy, call (800) 331-6197.

### RICH KIDS

I have been looking for a 1979 movie called *Rich Kids* on either videocassette or disc. Can you locate it for me?

Thomas M. Olevano  
Vestal, NY

According to an MGM/UA Home Video spokesperson, this Robert Altman-produced comedy-drama is no longer available on

*As a service to our readers, Video Review will help track down "lost" or hard-to-find tapes or discs. Send requests to Video Review, Video Hunter, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.*

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BACK TO SCHOOL	6524202	PATTON	0043332	THE BIG CHILL	1527362	THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY	7340042	FROM HERE TO ETERNITY	1917002
JAWS: THE REVENGE	2230082	CADDYSHACK	6023262	JAGGED EDGE	1813542	A ROOM WITH A VIEW	3615012	ARTHUR	6024332
NADINE	3650072	OLIVER!	1760162	POLICE ACADEMY IV	6306082	PRETTY IN PINK	4224282		
THE ROAD WARRIOR	6028392	ROMANCING THE STONE	0894252	DIRECT HARRY	6017572	LAWRENCE OF ARABIA **	1514312		
THE SEVEN SAMURAI	3108212	MANNEQUIN	3439052	WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE	5601022	OUT OF AFRICA	2131162		
SOME LIKE IT HOT	0584532	COBRA	6201202	CABARET	4001432	GIANT	6080182		
THE MUSIC MAN	6147012	SOUTH PACIFIC	3506452	REAR WINDOW	2134052	THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI	1606302		
LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1986)	6297092	STAR TREK II—THE WRATH OF KHAN	2013352	FUNNY GIRL	1511262	THE LONGEST DAY	0577032		
		SHORT CIRCUIT	3607192	PALE RIDER	6097272	THE MORNING AFTER	5152052		
		BLUE VELVET	5150072	ANGEL HEART	7956092	48 HOURS	2022262		
		HELLO, DOLLY	0609132	GOLDFINGER	0539182	ALL ABOUT EVE	7656022		
		HAWAII	0661342	STREET SMART	3443092	TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD	1022282		
		NORTH TO ALASKA	7310262	THE KARATE KID	1710412	THE QUIET MAN	4032122		
		RAISING ARIZONA	3634082	TRUE GRIT	2028532	THE STING	1005302		
		STAR TREK III—THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK	2016322	THE RIGHT STUFF	6043142	ROXANNE	1960062		
		SCARFACE (1983)	2168042	STAR WARS	0564652	WITNESS	4114132		
		THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK	0910412	RISKY BUSINESS	6033402	A PASSAGE TO INDIA **	1741362		
		THE GODFATHER PART II	0018002			STAR TREK—THE MOTION PICTURE	2035212		
		NATIONAL LAMPOON'S VACATION	6039442	<b>BLOCKBUSTERS</b>					
		NOODLES	6550012	ORAGNET	2227032	A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET III	3432022	THE ALAMO	0583212
		CHARIOTS OF FIRE	6014432	LA BAMBA	1963032	CHARLOTTE'S WEB	2095102	BLACK WIDOW	3630022
		BURGLAR	6309052	PLATOON	6500032	STARMAN	1723202	THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD	0855222
		THE AFRICAN QUEEN	0511362	NO WAY OUT	6558032	GHOSTBUSTERS	1742682	JANE FONDA'S NEW WORKOUT	5112042
		AGNES OF GOD **	1812222	LETHAL WEAPON	6308062	ANNIE	1516132	BEN HUR	2603232
		GANDINI **	1533042	THE COLOR PURPLE	6301032	M*A*S*H	0055382	SINGIN' IN THE RAIN	2554222
		ALIENS	3609092	PREDATOR	3649012	BILL COSBY, HIMSELF	0935182	WAR OF THE WORLDS	2094292
		THE GLENN MILLER STORY	2130412	STAR TREK IV	0039472	FIDDLER ON THE ROOF	0551372	STAND BY ME	1924192
		BOOY NEAT	6020112	THE SOUND OF MUSIC	0039472	AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN	2021352	MY FAIR LADY	3507512
		THE NATURAL **	1649132	RETURN OF THE JEDI	3547532	PORKY'S REVENGE	0993172	HEARTBREAK RIDGE	6289172
		THE KARATE KID II	1894152	BEVERLY HILLS COP	2053362	BELIEVERS	6554072	THE GREAT ESCAPE **	0638002
		ALIEN	0002572	AN AMERICAN TAIL	2184042	COCOON	3553882	SHENANDOAH	1019232
		BLADE RUNNER	3104332	THE TEN COMMANDMENTS	2026302	THE MISSION	6303012	TERMS OF ENDEARMENT	2014262
		BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID	0517632	BACK TO THE FUTURE	2114172	THE DEER HUNTER	2124152	CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD	4294072
		OKLAHOMA!	0054472	ROBOCOP	2350022	TODSIE	1509122	FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF	4273022
		SUPERMAN IV	6311012	JUMPIN' JACK FLASH	3627072	THE FLY (1986)	0615492	JEWEL OF THE Nile	3571602
		THE QUEST FOR PEACE		CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG **	0548252	ROCKY IV	3570462		
				PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE	6098342				
				THE FLY (1986)	3617172				
				BLAZING SAOLES	0012482				

\*NOT AVAILABLE IN BETA.

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Just look at what's happened to the prices on videocassettes! Contemporary hits like *Crocodile Dundee* have been reduced from \$79.95 to \$19.95! Classic favorites like *The Sound of Music* have come down from \$79.95 to just \$29.95! What's more, new releases are no longer automatically priced at \$69.95 or \$79.95—many of them are now immediately available at \$29.95 or less. So you can now easily build a library of your favorite movies—at truly affordable prices!

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# \_\_\_\_\_

## Video Exposures of All Sorts; Plus, the Father of Rock 'n' Roll Talks Gear

### FLASHER VIOLATES TAPES; RENTERS YAWN

The inveterate video renter knows that life is full of surprises—tapes that aren't re-wound, tapes with weird, insoluble tracking problems, tapes that melt inside the VCR. So renters in the Albany area were nonplussed to find that the copies of *Tin Men* and *Crocodile Dundee* they took out had homemade pornographic codas tacked on. "We haven't heard from any customers; we found them ourselves when we were checking some tapes," says the incredulous Bob Believe, owner of Creative Video in Niskayuna, New York. It seems that some disturbed wag has been renting popular titles and inserting amateur erotic footage (all from the neck down, and shot, according to police, at a "well-known local motel"—well-known for what, we wonder) after the end credits of each tape. In addition to sex scenes, the video flasher's *oeuvre* consists of shots of "a guy wearing girl's underwear," if store owner Believe is to be... never mind.

Sounds distasteful enough, and we suspect the reason that Creative Video hasn't received any complaints is that folks



usually stop watching a tape way before the gaffer's name appears on-screen. While police comb the store's inventory records looking for clues to the video flasher's identity, we have a suggestion for decency groups looking to stem the tide of filth over-

whelming this great nation. In the spirit of fair play and all that, these people could easily rent a few of the hotter X-rated videos on the market and insert various threatening or inspirational messages therein. Now, wouldn't *that* be special?



### MAYBE SO, BUT ELVIS WAS BY FAR THE MORE INVENTIVE KISSER



Give a guy a surprise boxoffice hit and he sometimes develops a bad case of hubris. Patrick Swayze, star of *Dirty Dancing*, got real miffed recently when he was rejected for one-half of the title duo of TV's *Elvis and Me*. (He wasn't up for the part of Me, obviously.) Grousing to the press (while no doubt curling his lip), Swayze remarked: "If I dye my hair black, I'd look a great deal like Elvis. I sing and dance as good as he did, too." Should we assume that Swayze would like to make movies as good as Elvis did, too? Ones like *Clambake*?



### LIVE BAIT?

Anybody out there see the unpunctuated *Jaws The Revenge* in its theatrical release? No? Well those of you who waited for the home video version (from MCA) won't be seeing the ending that director Joseph Sargent shot for the movie. (We can hear the auteurs screaming bloody murder already.) Not to give anything away, but the theatrical



version of this boxoffice failure (which was given the green light by the same guy who gave Terry Gilliam such a hard time about releasing *Brazil*—so go figure) featured the death-by-shark of one of its most popular characters. "Some actors have taste," commented actor Mario Van Peebles to the *New York Post*, "and some actors taste good." Given that his two most prominent movie appearances have been in this and *Heartbreak Ridge*, we can guess which kind he is. But test audiences balked at seeing Mario turned into shark food, so he was asked to return to the set and reprise his role as a marine biologist. The video version resurrects his character. We wonder if the laser disc version will feature both endings, like *Topaz* does.

## MY DINNER WITH UNDRRESS

Custom-made for the lonely guy who doesn't mind talking to his TV set: L.A.-based BTF Productions' *Dinner with a Naked Lady*, which, if the truth-in-advertising law was observed to the letter, would be called *Dinner with an Almost Naked Lady*. This 30-minute "interactive" video brings a quasi-bimbo into your living room (as if you couldn't do that yourself) and then, through the use of on-screen prompts that tell you how to reply to her less-than-profound musings, helps you pry her out of her clothing (an altogether trickier proposition). Those detecting more than a taint of male-chauvinist piggery in this concept are expected to be pacified by the fact that its co-writers, Jim and Terri Mandel, found love and got married while collaborating on the project and by their claims that the whole thing is a satire of sexual stereotypes. Be that as it may, it sure portrays those stereotypes accurately, as soon-to-be-almost-naked Vanessa Giorgio romps around "your" apartment, almost wrecks "your" stereo and acts real impressed when you tell her about "your" efforts to save the whales. And

since it's a tape and not real life, you can fast-forward to the good part, such as it is. We'll take our chances dating, thanks.

For those who already have a lady around the house who would take her clothes off *if she only knew how*, the Learning Annex, a Manhattan-based adult education center with locations in 18 cities, is marketing a videotape of one of its most popular classes: *How to Strip for Your Man*. The class itself is for women only, but the tape is available to anybody. The teacher is certainly qualified: Going by the mere and mysterious moniker GiO, she's worked with the Twyla Tharp Dance Company (under what name we don't know) but achieved most of her fame in the documentary *Stripper*. Guys expecting to get their jollies from this tape ought to be warned: This is a serious class, dammit—GiO demonstrates exercises, and plenty of 'em, before getting to the nitty-gritty. She also discusses props, music and clothes, with an aim toward creating the right erotic atmosphere for the ensuing striptease. The Learning Annex assures us that the tape is "discreetly mailed."



By Laurie Werner

The horror...the horror... Reports out of the South Pacific have **Marlon Brando** trying to shed some of his girth so he can go before the camera again. The movie that's luring him out of retirement (his last appearance—no Blob jokes, now—was in 1980's *The Formula*, out on tape from MGM/UA) is something called *Jericho*, about an ex-CIA agent. Brando's recent indifference to acting has been well chronicled, so what's luring him back to the movie set?

We suspect that our erstwhile star has a thing for *Jericho*'s screenwriter, a guy by the name of Marlon Brando.

In the continuing **Meryl Streep** Master That Dialect Sweepstakes, the language of Tolstoy gets the Streep treatment in the upcoming *The Barber of Siberia*. It's a flick concerned with tonsorial trends in the tundra (just kidding), directed by Nikita Milchalkov, best known in this country for *Dark Eyes*, which starred **Marcello Mastroianni**. For those of you keeping score, Streep recently tackled alcoholic slurring (for *Ironweed*) and the down under accent (imagine her saying "g'day!") for *Evil Angels*, directed by Fred Schepisi (who last steered Streep in the English-accented *Plenty*), due in theaters this fall.

Back in Moscow, **Arnold Schwarzenegger** is working on another sensitive role, playing a Soviet cop who pursues a drug dealer all the way to Chicago, where he meets up with Second City native **Jim Belushi**. The flick, which will be released on video by IVE after its theatrical run, is called *Red Heat* (not to be confused with *Red Dawn* or *Body Heat* or Arnie's own *Raw Deal*, for that matter, though we wouldn't blame you if you did).

On the TV scene, wine-cooler pitchman **Ringo Starr** is negotiating with NBC to star in a series called *Flip Side*. This one's about a rock star who takes a sabbatical from the music world to raise his children after his wife is callous enough to kick the bucket. Kind of a pop-life version of *My Three Sons*, and we can hardly wait.



## VIDEO BOWS TO MATH

Is it psychedelia or is it science? That's what you're likely to ask yourself when you glom *Fractal Fantasies*, a videotape from the Mill Valley, California-based Computer Art Resource. The swirling, colorful computer-generated images accompanied by appropriately spacey synthesizer music sure look like someone's idea of a good trip, but it wasn't acid-addled whimsy that produced the pretty pictures.

All the artwork on this tape was based on a new branch of mathematics called fractal geometry. Mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot's discovery of this field inspired artist Charles Fitch to pursue a line of inquiry into its aesthetic possibilities. Animating

those images resulted in *Fractal Fantasies*.

According to Computer Art Resource, "the nature of a fractal object is that it is made up of an infinite number of smaller, similar copies of itself." Sounds fairly cosmic, and looks that way, too. The fractal landscapes featured on the program are far more varied than a non-mathematician would expect, and they're peppered with a wide variety of far-out colors. This means the amateurs in the audience—those who think an isosceles triangle is a minor orchestral instrument—can groove on them without feeling ignorant. Or even thinking about feeling ignorant.

## STARSPOT: CHUCK BERRY

Chuck Berry was in New York City recently to accept the D.W. Griffith Award for Best Documentary for *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, the star-studded birthday celebration of the man and his music organized by lifelong fan Keith Richards and director Taylor Hackford (reviewed in the April '88 *VR*). With the movie out on MCA Home Video and an autobiography just published, Berry was hitting the promotional circuit for the first time in years. Before *VR* talked to the rock legend, however, we were warned that he tires easily of the same old questions, so we thought we'd stick with the subject we know best, i.e. video.

**VR:** Are you pleased with the movie's transition to video?

**BERRY:** I don't know the (home video) industry all that well, but I'm learning it. Naturally, I hope it's well received.

**VR:** The music obviously plays a big part in a release like this, and we can tell you firsthand that the Hi-Fi soundtrack is fantastic.

**BERRY:** Thank you. I've only watched it in screening rooms so far, but it sounded great in there, too—which makes me very happy. I want people to be able to enjoy it.

**VR:** How about future plans? Do you have any video-related projects coming up?

**BERRY:** Yes. In fact, I was just talking with the BBC about doing an educational tape for them. I guess it's for a series or something. I'll be providing them with a pilot on VHS, which I'll be doing myself. It'll be an instructional tape on how to play the guitar. I'll also be giving my impressions on some of my fellow artists, which I'm very happy about.

**VR:** That could be the ultimate how-to video; think of all the people who grew up learning your songs and your technique from other artists.

**BERRY:** Yeah, I suppose. But there are lots of other guys playing out there, you know? And I'd like to know how some of them do those things, too. I'm called the Father of Rock and Roll and the King of Rock and Roll and all that, but we're all cogs in the



wheel. There's nothing new.

**VR:** We've heard you're a video enthusiast in your own right. How did that come about?

**BERRY:** I started with professional video in the early '70s, when I bought a company called Carplex. They did commercials and things like that; that was also where Chuck Berry Communications Systems got started. Anyway, I bought the company in 1973 and sold it three years later. The first videocamera I ever owned was a big, gray Bell

& Howell 150 studio camera. I still got it somewhere, too. It's probably worth about \$40 now.

**VR:** What sort of video equipment do you use at home?

**BERRY:** VCRs? I've used Panasonic, RCA, JVC, Mitsubishi, Itsuishi—all those "ishies." I also buy them as gifts for friends and relatives. So, I've gone through quite a lot of them.

**VR:** Do you have a media room or a viewing room in your home?

**BERRY:** Well, I've got a 16-foot projection TV system in one room. We have parties and things in there. I also have a library of about 90 tapes that I've compiled from my concerts and appearances over the years.

**VR:** Do you use a camcorder or videocamera at all?

**BERRY:** I'm using a Panasonic camcorder right now. In fact, I got two of them. It just about does everything, too. Auto focusing, nice fade-ins and all that. I've always been into photography, ever since I was a young boy. And video is an outgrowth of still photography. I try to keep up with the latest breakthroughs, you know, but the equipment goes out of style so fast.



## Hot Hits VIDEO REVIEW'S GUIDE TO THE TOP TAPES AND DISCS



This Month	TOP TAPES	Last Month
1	<b>BEVERLY HILLS COP II</b> Eddie Murphy, Judge Reinhold; Paramount, \$89.95	1
2	<b>THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS</b> Timothy Dalton, Maryam d'Abo; CBS/Fox, \$89.98	—
3	<b>STAKEOUT</b> Richard Dreyfuss, Emilio Estevez; Touchstone, \$89.95	—
4	<b>PLATOON</b> Charlie Sheen; HBO, \$99.95	2
5	<b>DIRTY DANCING</b> Patrick Swayze, Jennifer Grey; Vestron, \$89.95	4
6	<b>INNERSPACE</b> Martin Short, Dennis Quaid; Warner, \$89.95	—
7	<b>LA BAMBA</b> Lou Diamond Phillips; RCA/Columbia, \$89.95	5
8	<b>THE PRINCESS BRIDE</b> Peter Falk, Andre the Giant; Nelson, \$89.95	—
9	<b>THE LOST BOYS</b> Corey Feldman, Jami Gertz; \$89.95	9
10	<b>NO WAY OUT</b> Kevin Costner, Gene Hackman; HBO, \$89.95	6

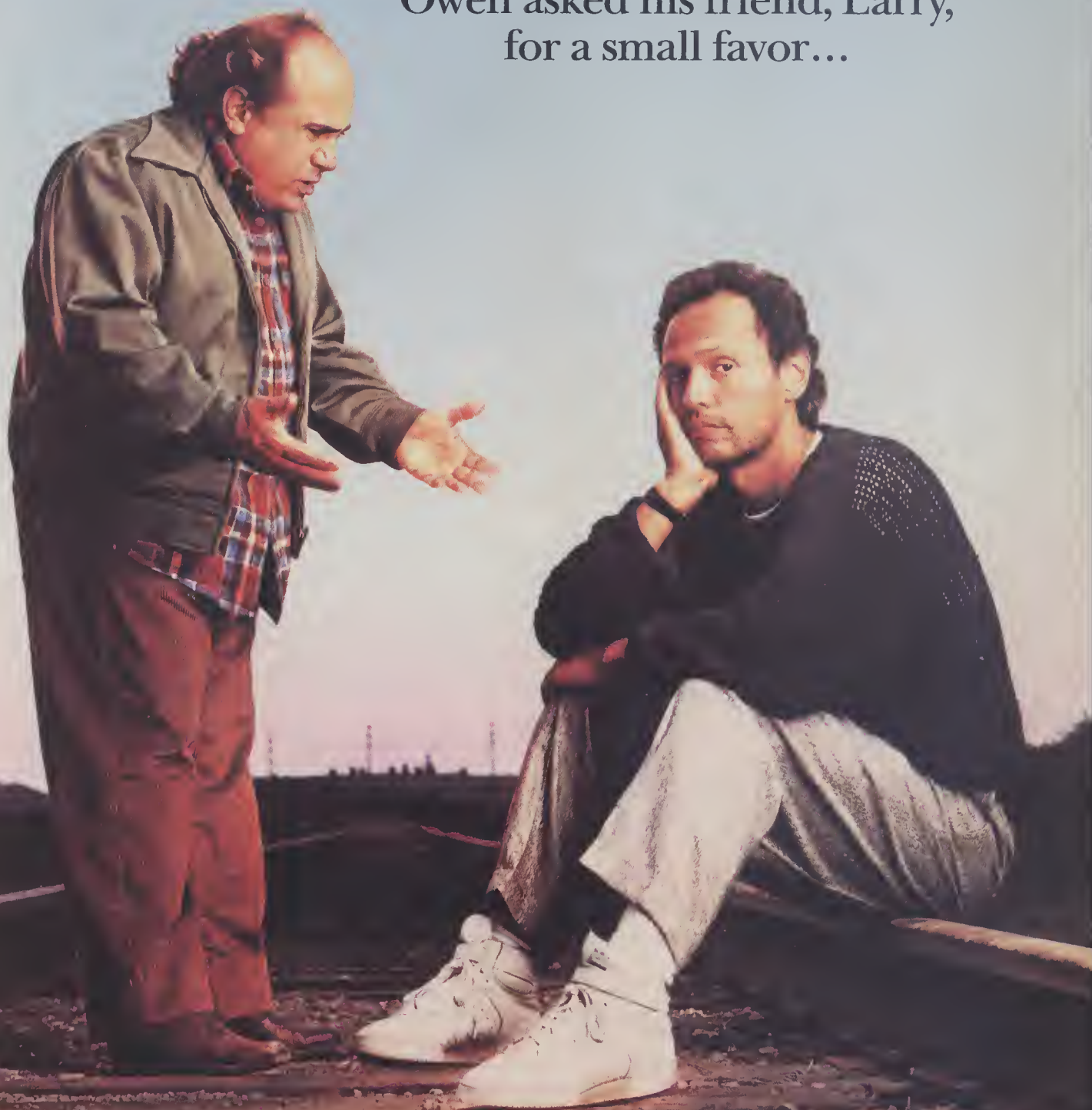
This Month	TOP DISCS	Last Month
1	<b>PLATOON</b> Charlie Sheen; HBO LV, \$39.95	—
2	<b>DIRTY DANCING</b> Patrick Swayze, Jennifer Grey; Vestron LV, \$39.95	1
3	<b>DRAGNET</b> Dan Aykroyd, Tom Hanks; MCA LV, \$34.98	6
4	<b>MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE</b> Dolph Lundgren, Frank Langella; Warner LV, \$34.98	—
5	<b>LA BAMBA</b> Lou Diamond Phillips; RCA/Columbia LV, \$34.95	2
6	<b>STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME</b> William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy; Paramount LV, \$34.95	3
7	<b>TOP GUN</b> Tom Cruise, Kelly McGillis; Paramount LV, \$29.95	—
8	<b>LETHAL WEAPON</b> Mel Gibson, Danny Glover; Warner LV, \$34.98	9
9	<b>LADY AND THE TRAMP</b> Animated feature; Walt Disney LV, \$34.95; CAV, \$44.95	8
10	<b>CROCODILE DUNDEE</b> Paul Hogan; Paramount LV, \$29.95	—

"Hot Hits" are based on a nationwide survey of leading video software specialty stores, chains, mass merchandisers and wholesalers. The lists include titles culled from retailers' current top tape and disc lists as well as distributors' prerelease sales printouts.

DIANNY DE VITO

BILLY CRYSTAL

Owen asked his friend, Larry,  
for a small favor...



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## 8mm Hi-Band Arrives, And 'Manchurian Candidate' Returns

### 8mm BREAKTHROUGH

By Robert Gerson

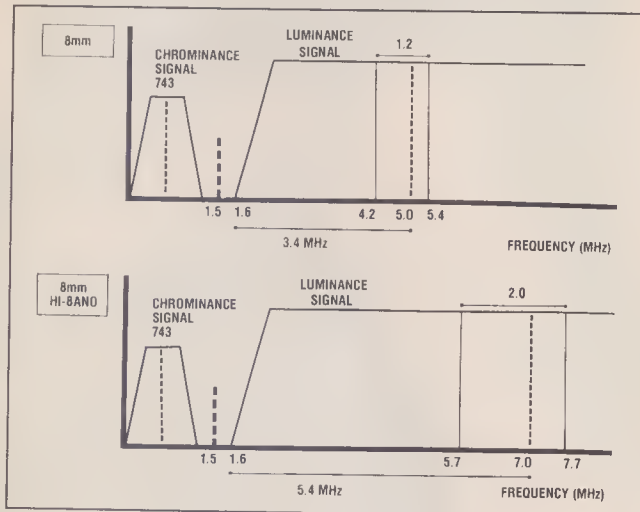
With VHS gone Super and Beta beefed up with ED, an improved 8mm video format was inevitable. So it's no surprise that the Japanese 8mm Video Group has announced agreement on a souped-up version of 8mm. The format will provide 8mm camcorders, and presumably decks, with a horizontal resolution capability that will at least match the 400-plus lines available from Super VHS and ED Beta.

Called 8mm Hi-Band (not Super 8mm, probably to avoid confusion with the home-movie film system), the new format is similar to its VHS and Beta predecessors in that it calls for an expanded, higher frequency band for the luminance signal. Instead of being 1.2 MHz wide and starting at a frequency of 4.2 MHz, the signal width has

8mm machines can be played on 8mm Hi-Band models, but not the other way around. 8mm Hi-Band also requires a cassette with a Hi-Band identification hole and special high-performance tape.

The new format has been agreed upon by six VCR manufacturers (Aiwa, Canon, Hitachi, Matsushita, Sanyo and Sony) and four tape makers (Fuji Photo, Konica, Maxell and TDK). The first 8mm Hi-Band camcorders could be ready for this summer's Consumer Electronics Show, and should hit stores in time for Christmas.

Japanese industry sources say that Hi-Band is intended as a step-up supplement to, not a replacement for, regular 8mm, much the same way that the PCM audio system is offered as an option. "We have always said that the 8mm system was designed to leave room for improvement,"

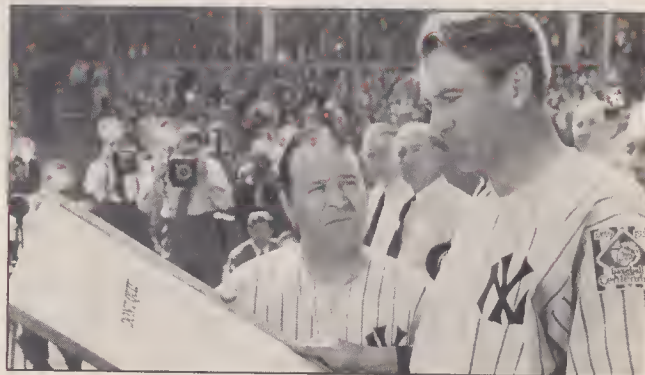


8mm video: before and after.

been increased to a full 2 MHz and starts at 5.7 MHz. This will boost the 330-line resolution the 8mm format offers by 25 percent.

Like Super VHS and ED Beta VCRs, 8mm Hi-Band equipment will provide one-way compatibility. Tapes recorded on

says Shin Takagi, president of Sony's video division. With advances in VHS and Beta performance beginning to create demand for superior video quality, "It would be logical to expect that work would be done on 8mm," Takagi adds. "We would not want 8mm to be left behind."



Baseball vid game: realistic, but not this realistic.

### VID GAME STEALS HOME

By Bob Strauss

Just in time for baseball season, Nintendo has introduced the most expensive game yet for its Nintendo Entertainment System. Jaleco USA, who licensed the game from Nintendo, expects its *Bases Loaded* baseball simulation game to sell in stores for about \$40, or \$5 to \$10 more than most Nintendo games—and Jaleco president Howard Rubin expects other gamesmakers to soon follow suit.

The reason *Bases Loaded* is so expensive, Rubin says, is that it uses over 2½ megabits of memory—about half as much as

a personal computer. Since the trend among Nintendo licensees is to produce more and more sophisticated games, Rubin says, these manufacturers can't help but shell out that much more for memory, and pass the cost along to the consumer.

Meanwhile, buyers of Nintendo's base system aren't paying more, but they are getting something different. The company has stopped packaging a free Super Mario Bros. game with its system, and is offering the Nintendo Player's Guide, which features in-depth reviews of about two dozen games and descriptions of 70 more.

### NEW INTERACTIVE SYSTEM

ACTV Inc., a New York City firm, has developed a system providing interactive video without back-and-forth tape shuttling or disc track hopping.

A creation of ACTV president Michael Freeman, a veteran consumer electronics and electronic toy innovator, the system relies on a computerized black box that generates graphics. The display "can cover or marry or be seen through" the TV picture on the screen, says Freeman. Instructions for graphic display options are buried in the vertical interval portion of the video signal. The box can also select any of several

hidden soundtracks for play.

The first commercial use of the ACTV technology is in Ideal's View-Master Video System introduced at the recent Toy Fair in New York. The Video System consists of a control box (which connects to a VCR and the TV) and a hand control with pushbuttons that let kids decide what the on-screen characters will do. The Video System will list at \$120, and tapes will be \$25 each.

ACTV has already sold multi-channel rights for Canada and the United Kingdom and is trying to interest US broadcasters and cable operators. (R.G.)

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DAT: ready for the US at last?

## NBS NIXES DAT COPYCODE

By Steve Schwartz

After a five-month testing program, the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) has turned thumbs down on the record industry-sanctioned Copycode anti-taping system, designed to prevent consumers from using digital audiotape (DAT) recorders to make high-quality copies of compact discs. Several congressional committees had ordered the program after intense lobbying efforts by the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA).

The controversial CBS-developed Copycode system uses an encoding/decoding process which removes a narrow band of frequencies from the encoded CD at approximately 3,840 Hz. Upon detecting this "notch," special circuitry in the DAT deck disables the recording mechanism at short intervals.

Prospects for industry adoption of Copycode now seem extremely dim in view of the NBS's findings. Declaring that Copycode "does not achieve its stated purpose," the NBS concluded that: 1) The system failed to prevent recording of notched material in nearly half of the tracks studied, and, in some cases, inhibited the recording of unnotched material; 2) Copycode encoding of CDs produced "discernible differences" in the sound quality between some prerecorded notched and unnotched material in both electrical measurements and listening tests; and 3) the system could be easily bypassed using external signal conditioning and components costing less than \$100.

In a prepared statement issued after the NBS announcement, Thomas Friel, vice president of the Consumer Electronics Group of the Electronic Industries Association, and chairman of the Home Recording Rights Coalition, stated that the findings have significantly undermined

the RIAA's credibility.

"We testified before Congress time after time, saying, 'It distorts the music,' and the RIAA said, 'It does not. We would never propose anything that could distort music,'" said Friel. "They even asked recording artists to testify for Copycode, without ever listening to it themselves. The industry asked a lot of people to take things on faith; I would expect those people to be more reluctant the next time."

The RIAA, meanwhile, responded to the NBS results with resignation and disappointment. RIAA president Jay Berman, acknowledging that Copycode was no longer feasible, pledged to resolve the controversy through "negotiation, legislation or litigation." And he repeated the RIAA's promise to sue any manufacturer that tries to bring a DAT recorder into the US before the matter is settled.

## CANDIDATE, JOHN WAYNE COME IN FROM THE COLD

By Steve Simels

An extraordinary spurt of long-unavailable movie classics will make their first home video appearances this spring.

Most intriguing of the lot is *The Manchurian Candidate*, director John Frankenheimer's 1962 paranoid conspiracy thriller starring Frank Sinatra and Laurence Harvey. A critical success but a boxoffice failure, *Candidate* had been unseen since its original theatrical run (star Sinatra, who owned the rights, was said to be uncomfortable with the movie's eerie parallels to the JFK assassination) until last year, when it became the surprise hit of the New York Film Festival. MGM/UA has scheduled it for a June release, at \$79.95.

A notable historical rediscovery is just out, courtesy of Key Video: the 1930 John Wayne epic *The Big Trail*. A Raoul Walsh-directed pioneer saga distinguished by its location shooting and superb 70mm photography by *Frankenstein* cameraman Arthur Edeson, *Trail* had been considered lost for years, but Key's version derives

from a pristine 70mm negative recently unearthed in Paris (see review in this issue).

Also due: the first home video versions of famous British productions of the late '40s—the Titanic docudrama *A Night to Remember*, Laurence Olivier's



Candidate Harvey's back!

*Hamlet* and *Henry V*, and classic tearjerker *Brief Encounter*—from Paramount Home Video at \$19.95 each. Closer to home, Key will release David O. Selznick's 1936 version of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, with Freddie Bartholomew, for \$14.98.

## TV COMMITTEE ENDORSES HDTV SYSTEM

The Advanced TV Systems Committee (ATSC) has voted to recommend adoption of the 1,120-line widescreen high-definition TV (HDTV) system developed by the Japanese government-owned NHK network as the official US standard for production of movies and TV programs. But the group's 26-to-11 vote was split strictly along ideological and political lines, indicating that despite wide support for the NHK system, it (or any other HDTV system) is still a long way from acceptance as a broadcasting and consumer product standard.

In effect, the vote split shows that most US and European TV manufacturers and commercial broadcasters are squared off against Japanese manufacturers and the US cable industry. Of the 26 votes in favor, seven were cast by Japanese manufacturers with plants here, including Hitachi,

Matsushita, Mitsubishi, Sony and Toshiba. Matsushita and Sony got to cast two votes each as both their broadcasting equipment and TV manufacturing divisions are ATSC members. Six more votes in favor came from US cable interests, including program suppliers and the National Cable TV Association. Also voting yes were the Motion Picture Association of America, the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, CBS and PBS.

Manufacturers voting against were RCA/GE Consumer Electronics (now owned by the Thomson Group of France), Philips Consumer Electronics (owned by N.V. Philips of Holland) and Zenith, the sole remaining American-owned TV manufacturer. Thomson and Philips are looking on their anti-NHK effort here as a way to head off Japanese incursions in Europe. Both back a very dif-

ferent HDTV system for European use, and Philips has an alternative system designed to meet US requirements. Zenith has yet to comment on the reasons for its negative vote, but the company has a long history of market conflict with the Japanese.

The other American networks—NBC and ABC—along with the National Association of Broadcasters and the Maximum Service Telecasters, also voted no, with backing from the David Sarnoff Research Center, Faroudja Labs and General Instrument. The Sarnoff Center, with support from RCA/GE and NBC, has thrown a system of its own into the ring, as has the Faroudja Labs. Despite the initial victory for NHK, the ATSC vote probably won't be definitive: A second ballot, which might produce very different results, is now being sought by the anti-NHK factions. (R.G.) □

**BIMBOS AWAY!**

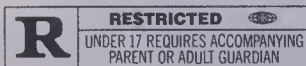


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# THE FORMAT WARS

*With six different formats, choosing a camcorder can be a real battle.*

*By Gregory P. Fagan*

**N**early 2 million Americans will confront a vexing dilemma this year: selecting the right camcorder from the over 110 different models available in no less than six worthy formats.

Based on past sales figures, most consumers will opt for familiar full-size VHS models, others for compact VHS-C camcorders. Many (and industry sources say the percentage is growing) will go with

the diminutive yet technologically advanced 8mm format. (And it's about to get better; see "Newsbreaks," this issue.) Some analysts predict that the arrival of S-VHS and S-VHS-C camcorders in significant quantities will fuel more fires in the format fight. And Beta,





**Sony's  
BMC-1000K:  
Has S-VHS  
made it obsolete?**

while no longer a true contender for the popularity crown, is still the pick for the millions with Beta VCRs. But an objective evaluation of each format's strengths and weaknesses leads to an obvious conclusion: that consumers should decide precisely what they

want their camcorder to do (and where) before they buy. After all, with an average suggested retail price in the neighborhood of \$1,800, these hybrid camera/recorders represent a far more significant purchase than a VCR. And, unfortunately, as the cost

and complexity of the equipment rises so does consumer confusion.

The accompanying chart helps clear things up by presenting the camcorder wars graphically. We've attempted to boil the questions of compatibility, advantages, disadvantages and outlook for each system down to essentials. But some differences and trends require further examination.

In terms of picture quality, camcorders incorporating S-VHS high-band recording technology can play king of the hill for a while. Results from the S-VHS-C examinations Frank Barr recently conducted for *V/R* at the Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory prove that S-VHS recorders stand far above their competition in picture performance.

S-VHS technology's main advantage is in horizontal resolution, a measurement which technicians use to represent a video image's

FORMAT	MODELS	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Beta	2	Before the arrival of S-VHS, the two Super Beta models available offered the sharpest camcorder pictures around. Sony designed these Betamovie models for semi-pro operation, with the serious videophile in mind. That means solid, well-balanced construction and easy-to-operate manual focus settings (although the BMC-660K includes an auto-focus setting). They work well in tandem with Sony's top Beta editing decks.	The Betamovie camcorders are camera/recorders in the purest sense—you can only use them to shoot and record, not play back. They also lack the digital features now available on other camcorders. Beta is a minority format, which limits playback opportunities.
8mm	31	Like Super Hi-Band Beta and S-VHS, the 8mm system uses high-band recording. It also includes a number of other built-in features: flying erase heads (for cleaner edits), high-fidelity FM (monaural) audio during recording and PCM (pulse code modulation) audio capability. Most adapt easily to editing controllers (such as the Sony or new Hama models) and include a full complement of electronic features. Camera companies prefer 8mm and use their experience to match optics systems carefully to the image sensor. All offer an electronic viewfinder for in-camera playback with up to two hours of record time. The diminutive tape size allows for a smaller machine, with more features per ounce than the other formats.	8mm camcorders lack easy compatibility with a wide base of home decks. Their metal particle tape is more expensive. To date, 8mm models have failed to live up to the format's specifications. They cannot record live stereo with video. Few stripped-down, inexpensive models are available. Only a few of the major video electronics companies (Sony, Fisher and Sanyo, for example) support the format. 8mm Hi-Band (see "Newsbreaks," this issue) may render current 8mm equipment partially obsolete.
S-VHS	10	Nothing matches S-VHS for picture performance, and these camcorders generally include other high-end options as well. Some models feature 10:1 power zoom lenses, flying erase heads, some variation on the VHS indexing system and full VHS Hi-Fi stereo recording systems. Copies duplicated from S-VHS masters suffer less noticeable loss in early generations than those from other current formats. S-VHS camcorders can record for up to six hours on a T-120 S-VHS tape. They can also be used to tape broadcasts off TV without a loss in image quality. And there's still room for engineers to improve on the performance of this year's S-VHS models.	The current Super VHS camcorders available are first-generation models, so they will undoubtedly undergo further development. This is evident in the initial shortage of high pixel-density CCD chips, which has kept the camcorders from reaching stores in great numbers. S-VHS tape is expensive. Few stripped-down, inexpensive models are available. Optimum playback requires an S-connector-equipped monitor/receiver. These camcorders are relatively large.
S-VHS-C	7	Unlike some of their VHS-C cousins, S-VHS-C camcorders do more than point and shoot. All offer full in-camera playback features, with electronic viewfinders and up to an hour's record time. They share the high picture quality advantage, the low generational-loss factor and many of the attractive operational features included on the larger S-VHS decks—and add small size and low weight.	The compact S-VHS models share full-size S-VHS's drawbacks. They're new; there was an initial shortage of adequate image sensors; the tape is expensive; the first models are high-priced; and they require an S-connector-equipped set for playback. They also lack Hi-Fi sound. And S-VHS-C tapes require a cassette adapter for playback in table decks. It's not a major problem, but they record for the shortest amount of time of any format—60 minutes.
VHS	26	Full-size VHS camcorders are to the Video Generation what the Olds Cutlass was to the Me Generation. With practice comes proficiency, so these familiar big-body models enjoy the fruits of a few years' development and quality control. They record for up to eight hours with a T-160 tape, and some models share all the electronic features available on S-VHS and 8mm machines, yet cost less. All have electronic viewfinders for in-camera playback.	The worst you can say about VHS is that it won't get much better. VHS picture quality will never compete with S-VHS, Super Hi-Band Beta, ED Beta or the newly promised Super 8mm. VHS camcorders are large, and likely to stay that way. In general, recorded audio quality is only fair.
VHS-C	33	The smallest and least expensive camcorders on the market are VHS-C models. Simple point-and-shoot camcorders weigh about two pounds. Videographers can easily play their tapes back on any VHS deck with the supplied adapter. Some of the larger VHS-C models include all the playback controls of their full-size counterparts, and all now include both SP and EP recording capability for making tapes up to an hour in length.	Like full-size VHS, VHS-C is a format that has reached maturity. Someday it will be replaced by S-VHS-C. Recorded audio quality is fair, at best. These camcorders share the short record time (one hour) and compact-cassette adapter drawback of the S-VHS-C system.

detail. To end up with this number, we multiply a machine's video frequency response (in Megahertz) by 80. Since the S-VHS system offers frequency response up to 5.5 MHz, we can expect optimum performance of up to 440 lines of resolution. That's quite a leap from Super Beta's 260 (3.24 MHz), 8mm's 266 (3.33 MHz) or the 234 lines offered by standard VHS (2.92 MHz). But these numbers can be misleading.

Our chart includes average performance results from APEL tests over the past few months for each of the formats. As you'll notice, not all formats live up to the theoretical top numbers envisioned by their designers. S-VHS and 8mm models, for example, have yet to attain their full potential. Standard VHS and Super Beta, older formats with years of development under their capstans, often meet or slightly exceed their

**RCA's S-VHS  
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stated specs. Understanding the reasons for these disparities, and what engineers must do to overcome them, can make selecting a camcorder less confusing.

Let's look first at the newest developing formats, S-VHS and S-VHS-C. Like all

camcorders, these include four main elements—a lens, an image sensing device (either a CCD or MOS chip), a recording head assembly and a tape transport system—all wrapped up in a hard plastic shell. The image sensor, which transforms

AVERAGE SPECIFICATIONS		COMPATIBILITY	OUTLOOK
<b>HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION</b> (lines)	<b>270</b>	Tapes recorded on Betamovie camcorders play back on Super Beta decks. The BMC-1000K adds a Hi-Band recording system that can be switched off and only plays back on Hi-Band Beta decks.	Beta will remain a minority format, and extended-definition Beta (ED Beta) products will put further development of Super Beta in question.
<b>COLOR CONTAMINATION</b> (IRE)	<b>0</b>		
<b>WHITE BALANCE</b> (IRE)	<b>10</b>	Bmm tapes only play on 8mm decks (not Beta, VHS or S-VHS), but the camcorders come with adapters that connect them to monitor/receivers for direct playback.	There is room for performance improvements in the Bmm system, such as the use of metal evaporated (ME) tape and the addition of Hi-Fi PCM stereo in the record mode. Bmm Hi-Band is not expected to arrive until the winter.
<b>SNR</b> (red-field chroma, AM) (dB)	<b>38.9</b>		
(luminance) (dB)	<b>40.4</b>	S-VHS tapes will not play back on regular VHS decks (or Beta and Bmm, for that matter). Direct camcorder playback requires a monitor/receiver with an S-connector (for full S-VHS performance). S-VHS camcorders can record in the conventional VHS mode.	Chip improvements will add higher resolution to S-VHS camcorder recordings, and mass production should bring down the cost of both the machines and the tape.
<b>HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION</b> (lines)	<b>234</b>		
<b>COLOR CONTAMINATION</b> (IRE)	<b>6</b>	Compact S-VHS tapes (S-VHS-C) require an additional cassette adapter for playback in an S-VHS VCR. S-VHS camcorders all come with the necessary outputs for direct hookup to a monitor/receiver; otherwise they are as compatible as their VHS brothers.	Likewise, there is little hope for the addition of Hi-Fi audio within the small S-VHS-C package.
<b>WHITE BALANCE</b> (IRE)	<b>12</b>		
<b>SNR</b> (red-field chroma, AM) (dB)	<b>40.9</b>	Full-size VHS decks offer the greatest compatibility, thanks to the wide base of VHS home decks. VHS tapes don't play on Beta or Bmm decks—but S-VHS decks can play back regular VHS tapes (with no gain in picture quality).	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
(luminance) (dB)	<b>41.0</b>		
<b>HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION</b> (lines)	<b>378</b>	The compact version of conventional VHS (VHS-C) shares compatibility characteristics with its big brother. Many VHS-C models are simple point-and-shoot camcorders without jacks for direct playback. These all require an additional cassette adapter for playback within a VHS or S-VHS table deck.	VHS-C will go through the same gradual phasing out as full-size VHS, and the addition of Hi-Fi audio remains unlikely.
<b>COLOR CONTAMINATION</b> (IRE)	<b>3</b>		
<b>WHITE BALANCE</b> (IRE)	<b>9</b>	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
<b>SNR</b> (red-field chroma, AM) (dB)	<b>41.0</b>		
(luminance) (dB)	<b>41.2</b>	Full-size VHS decks offer the greatest compatibility, thanks to the wide base of VHS home decks. VHS tapes don't play on Beta or Bmm decks—but S-VHS decks can play back regular VHS tapes (with no gain in picture quality).	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
<b>HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION</b> (lines)	<b>245</b>		
<b>COLOR CONTAMINATION</b> (IRE)	<b>8</b>	The compact version of conventional VHS (VHS-C) shares compatibility characteristics with its big brother. Many VHS-C models are simple point-and-shoot camcorders without jacks for direct playback. These all require an additional cassette adapter for playback within a VHS or S-VHS table deck.	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
<b>WHITE BALANCE</b> (IRE)	<b>11</b>		
<b>SNR</b> (red-field chroma, AM) (dB)	<b>38</b>	The compact version of conventional VHS (VHS-C) shares compatibility characteristics with its big brother. Many VHS-C models are simple point-and-shoot camcorders without jacks for direct playback. These all require an additional cassette adapter for playback within a VHS or S-VHS table deck.	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
(luminance) (dB)	<b>37.9</b>		
<b>HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION</b> (lines)	<b>245 SP/230 EP</b>	The compact version of conventional VHS (VHS-C) shares compatibility characteristics with its big brother. Many VHS-C models are simple point-and-shoot camcorders without jacks for direct playback. These all require an additional cassette adapter for playback within a VHS or S-VHS table deck.	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
<b>COLOR CONTAMINATION</b> (IRE)	<b>12.5</b>		
<b>WHITE BALANCE</b> (IRE)	<b>16.5</b>	The compact version of conventional VHS (VHS-C) shares compatibility characteristics with its big brother. Many VHS-C models are simple point-and-shoot camcorders without jacks for direct playback. These all require an additional cassette adapter for playback within a VHS or S-VHS table deck.	VHS will gradually be replaced by S-VHS, which should result in lower VHS prices somewhere down the road.
<b>SNR</b> (red-field chroma, AM) (dB)	<b>42.5 SP/39.9 EP</b>		
(luminance) (dB)	<b>36.9 SP/41.6 EP</b>		

its vision of the subject shot into a recordable electronic message, has the toughest job in the system. And, given S-VHS's capacity for 5.5 MHz of frequency response, the chip's job borders on impossible (at least for now).

That's because current chips boast pixel (picture element) counts of anywhere from 350,000 to 400,000. Simply put, the higher the pixel count, the greater the chip's potential to produce resolution. Since these solid-state image sensors first appeared in 1983, they only needed to live up to the recording capabilities of existing media—namely VHS (full-size and VHS-C), Beta and 8mm. Pixel counts between 210,000 and 250,000 sufficed (hence the frequent realization of full potential within the VHS and Beta formats). This sudden call for high-resolution chips with staggering pixel counts strained production facilities last fall, holding up the introduction of full-size S-VHS and compact S-VHS-C camcorders. And, while the current crop of S-video moviemakers can outpicture anything on the market, further chip development remains crucial.

The maturing 8mm format faces a different obstacle, and competition from S-VHS systems may offer a new impetus to surmount it. 8mm, say specialists, needs better tape (though it's not part of the 8mm Hi-Band system; see "Newsbreaks," this issue). The original specifications for the 8mm system called for a metal-based tape, and manufacturers presently offer consumers a wide variety of MP (metal particle) products. A far superior grade, called ME (metal evaporated) tape, would theoretically bring 8mm performance up to its full potential—with smoother, denser particles allowing for a stronger video signal on the same tape area as MP cassettes. For now, though, ME tape remains too expensive to produce in great quantities—and the video performance of 8mm camcorders merely matches that of conventional VHS and VHS-C. The two Beta models on the market, meanwhile, surpass all but S-VHS and S-VHS-C in video performance.

The introduction of VHS Hi-Fi stereo audio recording on Zenith's VHS VM7100 and JVC's S-VHS GF-S1000 camcorders gives them sonic superiority. 8mm's AFM (audio frequency modulation) recording system uses the same principle as FM radio to produce *monaural* high fidelity with an 80 dB dynamic range, and this capacity for top sound draws many to the 8mm camp. Additionally, Hi-Fi VHS and S-VHS models are much heavier than typical 8mm camcorders—and lack the smaller format's capability for after-the-fact, PCM stereo audio dubbing with a PCM-capable 8mm VCR. (You can use a conventional VHS deck to dub audio onto the linear tracks of a Hi-Fi VHS tape.)

While engineers and electronics pundits battle it out over performance, consumers

## HOW MANY? HOW MUCH?

*We broke down the following list of available camcorders by format and price range, based on manufacturers' suggested retail prices. Retailers usually discount all but the newest models by five to 15 percent.*

**Beta**—Sony BMC-660K (\$1,495); Sony BMC-1000K (\$1,795).

**8mm**—Aiwa CV-50, Instant Replay Ultra, Ricoh R-260, Sanyo VM-8, Sanyo VM-10, Sony CCD-M8U (\$999 to \$1,300); Fisher FVC-801, Kyocera KD-1000U, Ricoh R-600, Sony CCD-M7U, Sony CCD-M9U, Sony CCD-V3, Sony CCD-V5 (\$1,301 to \$1,500); Aiwa CV-80, Canon E-70, Elmo ECR-8S, Kyocera KD-200K, Kyocera KD-3010U, NEC EM8, Olympus VX-801, Pentax PV-C800A, Pentax PV-C850A, Ricoh R-600S, Sony CCD-V9, Vivitar Magic 8 (\$1,501 to \$1,849); Canon E-708, Chinon C8-C60, Chinon C8-SC70, Minolta 8-8100, Olympus VX-802, Sony CCD-V110 (\$1,849 and up).

**S-VHS**—Hitachi VM-6000A (\$1,700); RCA CPR-350 (\$1,749); Canon F-1000S, JVC GF-S1000HU, Magnavox VR9244, Minolta 2000, Olympus VX-S405, Panasonic PV-S350, Pentax PV-C1SA, Quasar VM-22AC (\$1,849 and up).

**S-VHS-C**—Mitsubishi HS-C30U, Quasar VM52AC (\$1,600 to \$1,800); JVC GR-S55U, Magnavox VR9260, Panasonic PV-S150,

Sharp VL-C77UA, Toshiba SK-S80 (\$1,800 and up).

**VHS**—Hitachi VM-3100A, JC Penney 686-5350, Radio Shack 100, RCA CPR-250, Sears 53742 (\$999 to \$1,299); GE 9-9806, Hitachi VM-3000A, Quasar VM-21, RCA CPR-300 (\$1,300 to \$1,500); Goldstar GVM-70M, Instant Replay 661T3, Magnavox VR9240, Minolta V-1400, NEC V-50U, Olympus VX-404, Panasonic PV-320, Philco VCR807, Sharp VL-L80UA, Sylvania VCC157, Teknika CX711, Zenith VM7100 (\$1,501 to \$1,849); Chinon CV-T70, Instant Replay 921T3, Instant Replay 931T3, Olympus VX-403, Pentax PV-C66A (\$1,850 to \$2,000).

**VHS-C**—Emerson VCAM14, GE 9-9705, GE 9-9710, GE 9-9715, JVC GR-C9, JVC GR-C11, Panasonic PV-50, Quasar VM-40AC, Radio Shack 150, RCA CPR-150, Sharp VL-C855UA, Toshiba SK-40, Zenith VM6150, Zenith VM6175 (\$999 to \$1,299); Hitachi VMC30A, JC Penney 686-5600, JVC GR-25U, JVC GR-C7, NEC CV-30U, Quasar VM-51AC, Toshiba SK-60, Zenith VM6300 (\$1,300 to \$1,500); Chinon CVC-600, Magnavox VR8295, Magnavox VR8297, Minolta 3400, NEC CV-40U, Panasonic PV-100, Quasar VM-50, Sharp VL-C73UA, Sylvania VCC155, Teknika CX751 (\$1,501 to \$1,899); Toshiba 3D-CAM (\$2,850).—G.P.F.

generally base their purchasing decisions on compatibility with their current equipment. With few exceptions, you can play back any tape made with any camcorder on any TV in North America. But it's not always simple—which explains why full-size VHS camcorders, which can be easily connected to all TVs, rule the marketplace. The appeal of simply removing a tape from a camcorder, and playing it back immediately on any of the ubiquitous VHS machines has proven too strong a selling point for marketers in the other five formats to compete with. (Beta camcorders offer the same ease of playback, but only with Beta decks.)

Given the relative scarcity of 8mm VCRs, the format lacks VHS's universal convenience. Size, however, permits most manufacturers to include all the playback features you could want on the camcorder itself. Some models feature built-in video and audio outputs for direct hookup to a monitor. On many other 8mm camcorders, a snap-on adapter adds the same outputs.

VHS-C models introduced the concept of partial compatibility to the video world. The little tapes require an adapter for playback in a VHS VCR, and some (especially 8mm supporters) find the additional step clumsy.

Super VHS carries the partial compatibility concept one step further. To play back tapes recorded in the S-VHS mode, you need an S-VHS deck. You *can* play the tapes back on a monitor/receiver directly through the

S-VHS camcorder—but you'll need a set equipped with an S-connector. (You can use an S-VHS camcorder to record in the standard VHS mode, but why settle for lesser picture quality?) S-VHS-C models run into the same backward compatibility wall as their full-size counterparts, and add the same cassette-adaptor obstacle as their VHS-C brethren.

A final note: Think about where and how you'll play tapes back before you buy. If you can't reach the rear connections on your TV set easily, then models requiring a TV hookup for playback are less attractive than direct-to-VCR models. If your monitor/receiver (or A/V receiver) includes front panel jacks, then it's not as big a deal. (You should keep this in mind when shopping for a new set, too.) Also, think about the places outside your home where your movies will play. For example, friends and relatives with Beta machines can't play back your toddler's VHS-C-taped baller recital, unless you show up with deck in hand (or at least with the appropriate cables).

As you can see by the chart, camcorder options abound. Last month's Buyer's Guide (see "Camcorders," April '88 *VR*) breaks down all of the significant new features, and basic specifications, for your consideration. But before you enter the rhetoric-filled arena of the marketplace, figure out which format best suits your needs for the money—and how. □

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# TIPS

## FROM THE BIG CHAIR

By Glenn Kenny

**W**ho's in charge when you're shooting home video movies with your camcorder? The answer to that question may seem obvious—you are—but think about it. How many times have you let something else take charge of the video moviemaking process? Something like the event you're shooting? Or the piece of equipment you're shooting it with? While there's no substitute for experience, you could learn a thing or two from the people who helped invent moviemaking—directors.

While everyone gets a kick out of camcorders and their capabilities, not everyone appreciates what a camcorder really gives you: power. When shooting home videos, *you* are the director. Few people take advantage of this power for two distinct reasons. One is simple human nature: People have a tendency to get caught up in what they're shooting; and the resultant videos reflect this—which makes tiresome watching for those who weren't there at the time. The other reason: Directing is a discipline with a few rudimentary rules that take a little time to master. But by learning a bit about how to direct—how to take active control of what you're shooting while you're shooting it—your home video productions will look a lot better right off the bat.

While advances in home video technology have made using camcorders remarkably easy, it's still a big jump from directing home videos to directing big- (or even small-) budget movie productions. But it's probably a

cinch that the directors of tomorrow are teenagers who are experimenting with camcorders today. Chuck Russell, who directed *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* and is currently shooting a remake of *The Blob*, says, "I don't own a camcorder myself, but I think the growing number of camcorders sold is going to create a new generation of super camcorder kids. When I was a kid, I worked in Super 8 film. I used to throw my cat up in the air and film it coming down." While *Video Review* doesn't encourage such practices, there are obviously less anti-social lessons to be learned from the pros, whether you want to mount a full-scale amateur production or just make your birthday party tapes look better. The following tips provided by some Hollywood and TV heavyweights (many of which appeared in *VR*'s "Direct It" column), ought to help you get a handle on what directing is all about.

### WALKING IT THROUGH

Director Susan Seidelman (who helmed *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Making Mr. Right* and is currently shooting *Cookie*, starring Peter Falk and Emily Lloyd) says, "The more you can do in **preproduction** the better, because things move very quickly on location, and you don't have time to think." Preproduction is moviebiz talk for planning things before you shoot, and it's a good idea for any situation. Instead of just whipping your camcorder out as soon as your kid's birthday party

begins, you should take a few minutes to decide how you want to handle things.

Why should your tape start out in the midst of all the hubbub? In the calm before the storm, you should set up what directors call **establishing shots**. These introduce the viewer to the setting where the action is about to take place. In movies, these shots are usually handled by the second unit (a smaller, separate crew that handles location shots and the like), but since camcorder shooting is basically a one-person operation, the onus is on you. So make the most of it. Get a couple of shots of the room, its decorations, the birthday cake before the kids get at it, and so on. Keep them short—you want to set the scene, not create an abstract meditation on inanimate objects.

Aside from getting a few establishing shots, you can also use your preproduction time to plan what you're going to shoot once the action starts. Too many party tapes bob and weave like the point of view of a drunken guest, because the camera doesn't know where to look. So, even if you're shooting in a familiar environment, such as your own house, it's a good idea to walk through a few shots before things happen. If you know where the guest of honor is going to sit, for example, walk through the room until the camera settles on that space. A **tracking shot**—one that involves real movement, real momentum—is far more effective than the prosaic zoom,

a favorite tool of cheesy Italian horror-movie directors and unwary amateur videographers.

Preproduction with your camcorder becomes more complicated—and painstaking—once you decide to do scripted productions. Low-budget pioneer Roger

Corman—noted for shooting such cult classics as the original *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Bucket of Blood* in record-breaking time—acknowledges that only intense preparation makes such speed possible. “It saves a huge amount of time,” says Corman, “when you’ve already figured out the lighting, where you are going to point the camera and where you’re going to put the actors before you get to the set.”

If you're blocking out a scene on a home set, it always helps to give your actors explicit signs as to where they should be standing. You can do this by marking the spot on the floor with a piece of gaffer's tape. Honestly, it

works a lot better than pointing to a place in the middle of the room and saying, “There.”

### MAKING THE FRAME

When you block out scenes during preproduction, you're doing it for a reason: to keep most of the action inside the frame as you're shooting. In a scripted production this is easy, because you know what's going to happen and hopefully you've rehearsed things a bit. You may even have **storyboards**, which depict each shot



*Do your home videos lack direction?  
Here are some hints  
from Hollywood's finest.*

graphically. But shooting an impromptu event presents a challenge. If it's something really important to you, you want to get it all on tape; so how do you do it?

The answer is simple: You don't. You can't. On taping sports events, documentary maker Bud Greenspan told us, "No one expects you, armed with a single camcorder, to come up with Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*." Since you can't possibly do everything, the point is to make what you get interesting. That not only means keeping your eyes open for the best things to shoot; it also means presenting those shots in a coherent way. You don't want too much of your action taking place outside the frame. If you're interviewing somebody, go for a full-facial close-up—nobody likes to see just the strands of a person's hair. And once you've started a shot, try finishing it before going to anything else.

"Avoid whip pans," advises Eleanor Sanger Ringer, a producer for ABC Sports. "That's when you suddenly spin the camera to catch something you're not focused on. If you pan quickly when following action, things turn into a blur." You don't want to give your audiences that sick-on-a-merry-go-round feeling unless it's for a dramatic effect (which, of course, your audiences will always love you for). Better to use the pause control on your camcorder. If there's something else you want to go to, stop your shot, aim your camcorder at another part of the action and start shooting again. You don't want to subject your audience to several seconds of a scene being found in the viewfinder, getting into focus and so on. Sure, you can take that stuff out when you edit, but if you can avoid the hassle while shooting, you're better off.

When shooting scripted productions, framing is more than a matter of getting all the action in a shot. It's a dramatic device, and what you choose not to show is often as important as what you do show. Perspective—how your camera views the characters—is also important. Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu almost invariably placed his camera at chest level and kept it there. This established an intimate, non-judgmental, you-are-there feeling that placed the audience in the room with his characters. Jean-Luc Godard often got the same feel—only rawer—through a seeming indifference to framing; having one character at the far left side of the screen talking to another character barely visible on the right side. Fancy framing and camera angles can suggest a lot, but they only work if you're using them for a purpose. Visual style is fine, but if all a shot says is "look at this neat shot," then it's a waste.

"Let the material dictate its own style," says Arthur Penn, who's worked in a number of different styles—from the pained intimacy of *The Miracle Worker* to the wide vistas of *Little Big Man*. "If you start consciously forming one yourself, you're going

to start imposing it on the material—and I don't think that that's good."

### SHOOTING IN RHYTHM

Penn's mandate to let the material dictate your style is another way of saying that there are no hard and fast rules. Someone could tell you that in impromptu shoots, you should try and keep your shots short, which would sound like good advice. On the other hand, if you're shooting a golf match, or a meditation class, that advice might not apply. When establishing an in-the-camera rhythm for your home videos, the point is to think creatively. There's room for differences of opinion.

"A good way to go about shooting footage you can use later is to edit in the camera," says ABC's Ringer. "If someone slides in to home, go to a crowd shot of applause." Documentarian Greenspan goes for



*Camcorders give you something that most Hollywood directors would kill for: total creative freedom, something that's "practically impossible" to get in Tinseltown, according to Blue Velvet director David Lynch.*

something completely different: "There are people who go bang-bang-bang from shot to shot to get dramatic impact from quick cutting to fan reaction," he says. "But I like to give my audience the feeling that they are in the stadium watching the event. In such cases, you wouldn't shift from one image to another." Both see things from almost opposite points of view; yet both are acknowledged masters of sports shooting.

Naturally, there are tried and true rhythmic techniques that make for convincing dramatic effects. "In a suspenseful scene, you may want to hold shots longer than usual to build up tension," says Robert

Wise, director of *The Haunting*, one of the scariest movies ever. "By doing that, viewers will feel that something unexpected is about to happen. This anticipation can keep them on the edges of their seats." Of course, these effects also rely upon careful postproduction editing. But as far as the momentum of your impromptu shoots goes, your instinct is very often your best guide.

### GUIDING LIGHT

In movie production, lighting is a lot more than a question of minimum required illumination. In fact, that consideration doesn't even come into play, since more often than not an enormous amount of light is required just to get a readable image on film. For the camcorder user, the low lux readings of many of today's camcorders are a blessing, since they allow you to shoot in almost impossible light conditions. Of course there are variables. Try shooting by candlelight using a camcorder with a minimum required illumination of 21 lux, and you'd better hope that the tape at least has an interesting soundtrack. But for the most part, today's camcorders can get watchable results in the most dimly lit situations, making video *verite* shooting that much easier.

But if you're going for something more dramatic, playing around with lights can be helpful in establishing a mood. Sometimes it's as easy as rearranging the lights in the room in which you're shooting. Again, this can be more a matter of taste than anything else.

"Lighting is so subjective; there are no rules," says Jerry Kramer, the music video producer/director responsible for *Making Michael Jackson's Thriller* and a number of Van Halen and David Lee Roth clips. "It's really painting with lights and darks and colors. But people are intimidated. They think, 'Well, what do I know about lighting?' Well, you put up lights and you light the scene until it looks good to your eye. And basically, what you see is what you get—especially with video."

Sounds simple, and it is, but the more you get into lighting, the more there is to do with it. For example, there are about a million different ways to light a face, and for some faces, only a few correct ones. Josef von Sternberg, master of the baroque visual style, took enormous care in lighting the face of his star Marlene Dietrich, taking great pains to get her ineffable allure onto the screen. Sternberg did an excellent job, and Dietrich knew it. Years after their association ended, Dietrich was on the set of another picture, surrounded by make-up men and lighting designers all trying to get the right "look" for her face, and she was heard to mutter in frustration, "Joe, where are you?"

Unless you're a fetishist of some sort, you probably won't be making the correct lighting of someone's face your life's video work. But using lights for mood will become more important

*Continued on page 86*

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**MGM/UA**  
MGM/UA FILMS PRESENTS

# HOW TO READ A MOVIE BOX

When it comes to video packaging, what you see  
isn't necessarily what you get.

*By David Hajdu*

They say you can't judge a book by its cover (unless, of course, it's a Harlequin Romance). Well, much the same could be said about prerecorded videocassettes, because what's on the outside of a movie box isn't always a reliable indicator of what you're going to see and hear when you play the tape.

We're not talking about deliberate disinformation here. No major movie studio or video company is going to cheapen its reputation by knowingly misleading consumers (although smaller, less scrupulous companies have been known, for example, to release tapes of public domain movies, such as *It's a Wonderful Life*, minus 20 minutes of footage without mentioning it on their covers). Still, let's face it: A movie box is basically a marketing tool, and inevitably there's going to be a little hype along with the hoopla. Plus, occasional honest mistakes will happen.

By and large, then, there are seven basic categories to consider when you're assessing any video package: promotional quotations, credits, artwork, code language, design and errors. To illustrate these areas, we've created a home video release of a movie that does not, in fact, exist. The box for this phantom epic is confusing in all the above categories, from a not-exactly-accurate cast list to could-be-misleading technical credits. In real life, of course, it's unlikely that the packaging of any one home video would raise as many questions as our little fake flick, but in any case we think you'll get the picture.

Here's a phrase with multiple meanings. In the case of our mythical gangland comedy, a five-second scene was omitted from the tape because a mouse ate part of the original negative in 1961. In a real-life instance, a snippet of ambient music from MCA's home release of *The Invisible Man* had to be changed for copyright reasons. Otherwise, the tape version is identical to the original theatrical release. MCA includes the qualifying phrase "Home Video Version" as a courtesy to movie buffs, not out of legal obligation.

Other companies also use such phrases as "Home Video Edition" and "Special Video Release" without explanation. What does the cryptic language mean? Merely that the home video version is the same as the original theatrical version, as opposed to the TV version. Or, as a video executive puts it, "It's just a promo device, a way to make the tape seem special."

Actually, a program clearly labeled as a home video edition or version is probably different from its original release in some way. Soundtrack material may be changed, as in *The Invisible Man*. Very occasionally, footage is trimmed to avoid time compression or release on two cassettes. In other instances, footage cut prior to the theatrical release has been restored or unearthed, as in the cases of *Angel Heart* and *Lost Horizon*—a positive attribute that's usually heavily promoted on the box.



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# & COSTELLO Godfather

Presents ABBOTT & COSTELLO MEET THE GODFATHER  
OTT and LOU COSTELLO, with FERNANDO LAMAS,  
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ORTE, MANNY MOTA, DICK CAUTIER, BILLY MUMY,  
TOOMEY and JUDD NELSON as MOOKIE.  
ANDERER S. BERMAN. DIRECTED BY KENNETH ANGER.  
Black and white/90 minutes. © 1949.

"Absolutely incredible."  
—VIDEO REVIEW

BOG / US  
HOME VIDEO

Colorization of black-and-white movies probably began on movie posters, but today it's common on movie boxes, too. Witness the shot of Bud, Lou and Don Corleone here. Nice color, to be sure, but added after the fact, since elsewhere on the box we're informed the movie itself is in B&W.

These days, in fact, front-cover art in color is all but standard on boxes for vintage B&W movies—and for some that aren't so vintage. Take the actual CBS/Fox package for Martin Scorsese's 1980 *Raging Bull*, which is adorned with colored "action" photos. Now, we realize the box is clearly labeled "black and white," but still, visual images have a much more immediate impact than words, and this could qualify as marginally deceptive.

The point: Always check for the B&W or color credit printed on virtually every cassette package—especially if, like Ted Turner, you think there's something aesthetically inferior about black and white.

Say, does this logo look familiar? Well, it had better: We paid good money to have our pastiche pasta epic resemble the classic it's spoofing. But this sincerest form of flattery goes on in real life, too. Take, for example, the cover art for MGM/UA's video version of the horror flick *Munchies*; at first glance, it looks suspiciously like Gene Wilder's comedy *The Lady in Red* (except that—nice touch—*Munchies* adds a cartoony alien staring up a woman's dress).

This is called subliminal suggestion, or, in the vernacular, ripping off. Actually, the practice sometimes serves a useful consumer function. So long as a look-alike package doesn't step over the line into trademark infringement, it can provide insight into what type of movie a lesser-known title is. Let's face it: When you see the box for *The Perils of Gwendoline in the Land of the Yik Yak* or *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* at your local video store, you know right away they're supposed to be clones of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Here's an example of revisionist credits. In our *Godfather* spoof, then unborn Brat Packer Judd Nelson only has a cameo (he plays an antipasto), and yet, reading the box, you'd figure he's the star of the picture. Similarly, in real life, consider Vidmark's version of the original *Little Shop of Horrors*, which has Jack Nicholson's name and nobody else's on the tape cover. Granted, Nicholson's performance is hilarious. But if you weren't already familiar with the movie you'd be disappointed that it's only a bit part. The same goes for Sony's version of *The Bellboy and the Playgirls*, which promises "classic directing and screenwriting by Francis Ford Coppola." True, Coppola paid his directorial dues by shooting some new English-language footage to be tacked onto this French movie for its American release. But it strains credulity (not to mention the *auteur* theory) to rank this with *Apocalypse Now* or *The Conversation*.

To keep credits in perspective, then, always look for the formal credit block that lists performers and production personnel. With the exceptions of old and low-budget movies, the size and sequence of credits should indicate an individual's relative contribution to what you're watching.

Okay, granted, we rigged this, but the credit just isn't accurate. Legendary avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger didn't direct our fictional Abbott and Costello laff fest (although it's an interesting concept, to be sure). Instead, the pic was helmed by the similarly yclept Sidney J. Furie. A dumb mistake, nothing more. An actual example of this kind of confusion can be found on the Nostalgia Merchant home version of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, whose box credits the movie to the great John Ford. Sorry, guys: John Ford made *Young Mr. Lincoln* with Henry Fonda; John Cromwell made *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* with Raymond Massey. It says so right in the opening credits.

In fairness, we won't belabor this. All video companies (like magazines) screw up now and then, from occasional typos to whoppers like the above. It is interesting, nevertheless, that the bigger mistakes seem to occur in favor of promotable pieces of misinformation, such as John Ford's name. After all, we've never seen a John Ford movie labeled "Directed by John Cromwell."

How seriously should you take a reviewer's quote on a videocassette package? That depends. For example, in the case of our make-believe Bud and Lou opus, the quote comes courtesy of this very magazine. However, the make-believe review from which it's excerpted reads thusly: "It's absolutely incredible anything this inane was ever filmed."

For a real-life example, consider MGM/UA's home video version of *Grand Prix*, which is bannered "Spectacular Racing Sequences!"—Leonard Maltin. That line came from Maltin's *TV Movies*, a popular source, but the full review was actually a little less enthusiastic. To wit: "use of split screen and spectacular racing sequences won't mean much on TV."

Basically, context is everything, so when you read promo quotes, assume the worst. And note the attribution: Did the line come from a well-known critic or publication, or from the entertainment correspondent for a UHF station in Montana?

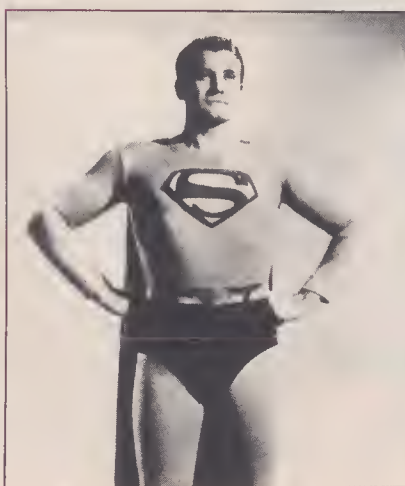
Here's yet another dicey area: sound. Yes, our bogus flick is clearly—and honestly—labeled Hi-Fi. However, check the movie's release date elsewhere on the box. Note that it's 1949, which means the movie itself is low-fi. The Hi-Fi indication here means only that the tape was duplicated in the Hi-Fi process, not that it's going to make a terrific demo for your A/V system.

Another area of sonic confusion is exemplified by the Paramount video release of the Oscar-winning adventure *Wings*. Note the tape box's prominent mention of the high-quality soundtrack "newly recorded for the video release." Nowhere is it mentioned, of course, that Paramount is referring to a new musical score, and that *Wings* is, in fact, a silent picture. Again, check the release date: As a rule, if a movie was made before 1928, it's a silent.

In a final irony, some video releases have more impressive audio than their covers would lead you to expect. CBS/Fox's home version of *The Robe*, for example, has the hidden virtue of superb stereo sound mentioned nowhere on the box. Only when you examine the label of the cassette itself will you note in small print the legend "stereo."

# SP

The Man of Steel in his big-screen incarnations: (right) Paramount's cartoon Superman, courtesy of the Fleischer animators; (from below left) Kirk Alyn, the first live-action son of Krypton; George Reeves, Superman of the '50s; and Christopher Reeve, the latest actor to don the red and blue union suit.



# ERMAN

## THE MAN OF STEEL'S FIRST 50 YEARS

By Ed Hulse

Since teenage science-fiction fans Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster first thought of Superman back in 1932, their creation has become one of the icons of American popular culture. And when the Man of Steel made his debut in *Action Comics* No. 1 in June 1938, few would ever have guessed that 50 years later the world would be celebrating his golden anniversary with home video releases of several blockbuster Superman movies as well as reissues of older Superman serials, cartoons and TV series episodes.

Though Superman's longevity may be surprising, he was a big hit right from the start. Within two years of his 1938 debut, Superman had not only won his own comic book (becoming the first costumed superhero to have a magazine devoted exclusively to his adventures) but he also had his own radio show and nationally syndicated newspaper comic strip. Movies were the inevitable next step, but the cinematic translation of the hero's superhuman attributes clearly presented problems to movieland's special effects wizards, who were just beginning to come into their own. Republic Pictures, then the leading producer of cliffhanger serials featuring Dick Tracy, Zorro and the Lone Ranger, bought the film rights to Superman from copyright holders DC Comics in 1940. Republic assigned effects technicians Howard and Theodore Lydecker to develop a convincing technique for filming scenes of Superman in flight. They came up with a life-size papier-mache dummy, which coasted along tightly stretched lengths of piano wire via tiny pulleys affixed to the dummy's outstretched arms and legs. They matched scenes using this method with shots of stuntmen bounding skyward from hidden trampolines. Satisfied with the test footage, Republic moved ahead with a serial built around the Man of Steel. But then DC Comics quibbled with Republic's scriptwriters and the project was quickly revamped to become *Mysterious Dr. Satan*, with the Superman character replaced by

CRITIC'S CHOICE



a non-super hero called The Copperhead. Meanwhile, the Lydeckers' successful experimentation was adapted in 1941 for a Republic serial centering on Captain Marvel, a Superman-inspired character that for a time rivaled the Man of Steel in audience popularity. (The 240-minute *Adventures of Captain Marvel* is available from Republic Home Video.)

DC Comics exercised more control over a series of animated Superman cartoons released by Paramount between 1941 and 1943. Initially, the cartoons were produced by Max and Dave Fleischer, the same brother team that presided over the studio's popular Popeye and Betty Boop cartoons, among others. Using Joe Shuster's original comic-book artwork as models, the Fleischer animators used every available technique to make the Superman cartoons as lifelike as possible, including the rotoscope method, which enabled animators to duplicate human movement by tracing the filmed gestures of actors onto the celluloid sheets that would be shot, one at a time, to create the final cartoon images.

The initial Fleischer effort, 1941's *Superman* (also known as *The Mad Scientist*), briefly recalled the arrival on Earth of the sole, superhuman survivor of the destroyed planet Krypton, and this survivor's adoption. "As the years went by and the child grew to maturity," intoned a solemn-voiced narrator, "he found himself possessed of amazing physical powers: faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound!" (This description, originally written for the *Superman* radio show, was later incorporated into the '50s TV show's opening as well.) The 1941 cartoon then cut to Clark Kent as an already established reporter at the *Daily Planet* in Metropolis. Within an 11-minute running time, he located and smashed the mountaintop fortress of a mad scientist who threatened Metropolis with a devastating death ray. This original cartoon is included in several cassette compilations, including *TV's Best Adventures of Superman, Vol. 1* (Warner), *Superman Festival No. 2* (Video Dimensions) and *Superman* (Media).

Most of the subsequent cartoons in the Paramount series revolved around master crooks with formidable superscientific weaponry, against which the police were powerless. Invariably, fellow *Daily Planet* reporter Lois Lane would stumble into the criminals' hands, necessitating a timely rescue by the Man of Steel, who would round up the bad guys in short order. The formula varied slightly to include hints of the supernatural ("The Mummy Strikes," in Video Dimensions'

*Superman Festival No. 1*) and, after 1942, America's involvement in World War II ("Jungle Drums," "The Eleventh Hour" and "The Japo-teurs"), all in Hollywood Home Theater's *Superman Color Cartoon Festival*. The series ended after 17 entries, not because its popularity had waned but because the time and expense of producing it—coupled with the licensing fee paid to DC Comics—prevented Paramount from making the margin of profit the studio traditionally expected from its cartoons.

It was another five years before Hollywood returned to the Man of Steel, during which time the character's popularity had grown

as his adventures appeared in four different monthly magazines and were novelized in a hardcover book. Since Superman's greatest appeal was with kids, a new Saturday-afternoon movie serial once again looked attractive—this time to Columbia Pictures.

Columbia purchased screen rights to the character and assigned veteran producer Sam Katzman to fashion a 15-episode chapterplay that would lead off with a recapitulation of Superman's origin. To play the dual role of Clark Kent/Superman, Katzman chose Kirk Alyn, a husky actor whose previous experience included supporting roles in such diverse products as Rita Hayworth musicals and Hopalong Cassidy westerns. With his square jaw and piercing eyes, Alyn was a good choice for the part. Spunky Noel Neill was cast as *Daily Planet* reporter Lois Lane and snub-nosed Tommy Bond (best known as the bully Butch in the *Our Gang* comedies) became cub reporter Jimmy Olsen.

The all-important flying scenes were set to be handled in what had by then become a standard method for depicting men in flight: Alyn would be suspended by thin wires in front of a rear-projection screen while prop men, out of camera range, would blow smoke in his direction (to simulate Superman's passage through clouds). The scenes, however, turned out poorly, with the piano-wire strands clearly visible in the rushes. So Katzman opted for a mixture of live action and animation. When outdoors, for example, a cartoon figure of Superman in flight would race across the screen and descend behind a convenient boulder. After a beat, actor Alyn would dart out from behind the rock. Upon takeoff, he would extend his arms skyward, and the camera would pan up to follow his animated counterpart. No one, not even the youngest kids, was fooled by the animation, but it didn't seem

to matter: *Superman* (1948) was one of the top-grossing serials of the decade, playing in some of the nation's most prestigious theaters. The complete 248-minute chapterplay is available on two cassettes from Warner under the title *Superman: The Serial, Vols. 1 & 2*.

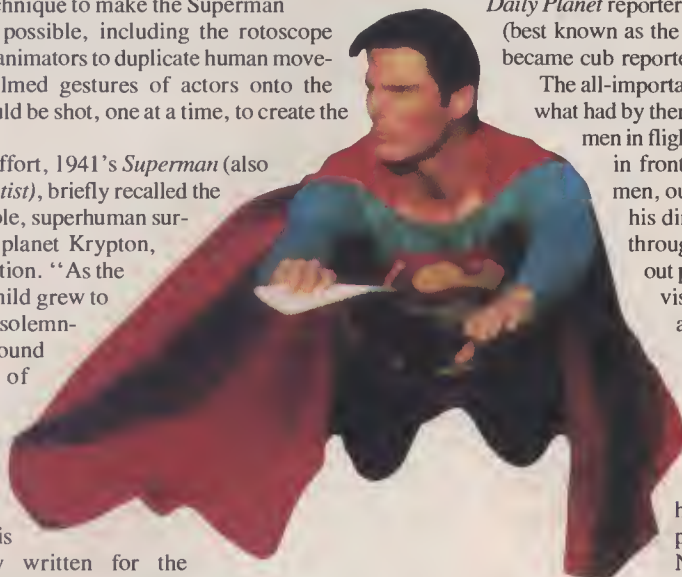
Alyn, Neill and Bond returned for a sequel, *Atom Man vs. Superman* (1950). It featured veteran character actor Lyle Talbot as the Man of Steel's archenemy Lex Luthor (who, rather unconvincingly, doubled as the masked and cloaked Atom Man). Luthor, being a standard-issue mad scientist, managed to project Superman into another dimension (not unlike the comics' "Phantom Zone") for a couple of episodes. He also secured a supply of Kryptonite and thereby placed the Man of Steel in more precarious positions than the previous serial did, making for some exciting cliffhangers.

Although *Atom Man vs. Superman* wasn't as popular as Katzman's first effort, additional sequels might have been contemplated but for Alyn's refusal to resume the title role, reportedly for fear of being typecast.

Meanwhile, the TV series was being instigated by producer Robert Maxwell, who had assured DC Comics that it would have script approval and creative input. Maxwell worked closely with Whitney Ellsworth, an editor for DC Comics, to ensure that Superman's small-screen adventures would be faithful to their four-color print inspiration.

Legend has it that Maxwell found George Reeves on a California beach and, impressed with the actor's muscular physique and handsome profile, offered him the TV lead. Reeves, whose acting career had fallen into decline after a promising beginning (he had supporting roles in *Gone with the Wind*, *Blood and Sand* and *The Strawberry Blonde* among others in the early '40s) accepted the assignment with relish.

Maxwell's initial effort was a feature-length pilot episode that was released theatrically in 1951. *Superman and the Mole Men* concerned the arrival of gnomelike creatures in a western mining town, whose citizens immediately attempted to lynch the little critters.



The timely intervention of Superman, who delivered an eloquent (for him) plea for tolerance, saved the Mole Men in the nick of time. The story has been interpreted by some as an analogy to the McCarthy anti-Communist witchhunts that dominated domestic politics at the time. *Superman and the Mole Men* was released on video last summer by Warner as part of its 50th anniversary Superman tribute.

The boxoffice and critical success of *Superman and the Mole Men* in 1951 convinced Maxwell that a TV series was indeed viable. TV's *Adventures of Superman* premiered in the fall of 1951. In addition to Reeves and attractive Phyllis Coates (who made a wonderfully acerbic Lois Lane), the cast included Jack Larson as Jimmy Olsen and white-haired John Hamilton as *Daily Planet* editor Perry White. The first-season episodes were, for the most part, rather grim little thrillers with plenty of menacing atmosphere, and they featured tussles with werewolves, ghosts and mad killers.

Reeves took his role very seriously, playing it without the condescension that often marred the performances of actors playing

comic-strip characters on screen. His Clark Kent was more capable than Kirk Alyn's, although tension on the *Daily Planet* front was maintained by his conflict with the frequently disdainful and often hostile Lois Lane.

The show was a hit, but Maxwell decided to make some changes. Coates' abrasive Lois went out the window, to be replaced by Noel Neill, returning to the role she had played in the Columbia serials. While Neill's Lois remained competitive with and skeptical of Clark Kent, she never attained the heights of bitchiness that typified Coates' characterization. It wasn't just Lois who got softer. Increasingly, the gritty crime plots were replaced by less-violent dramas involving eccentric professors and simple-minded

hoodlums, amid reports that the TV sponsors demanded a reduction in the body count for what was essentially a kids' show.

The TV series ran from 1951 to 1958. From 1954 on, the episodes were shot in color, even though there wasn't any regular network color telecasting in those days. The decision to film in color assured that *Superman* would enjoy a lengthy

*Continued on page 86*



## It's a Bird . . . It's a Plane . . . It's the Best of Superman on Video

### S E R I A L ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN (1950).

The second Superman serial is superior to the first in every respect save that of musical scoring (*Superman* recycled venerable Columbia serial music dating back to the late '30s). It's also truer to the Man of Steel's comic book adventures; the celluloid Superman performs some of the outrageous feats of strength associated with his printed-page exploits. (For example, he frightens a confession out of one villain by playing "catch" with him, tossing the hapless heavy high into the air above the *Daily Planet* building and catching him just before he plummets earthward to certain death.)

Another plus is the expanded role of Lois Lane, relegated in the first serial to the position of harried heroine in constant need of rescue. *Atom Man* gives Lois more to do by having her go "undercover" in several chapters, working for Luthor as a news reporter on his recently acquired TV station(!).

Casting and overall production values are on a par with the initial cliffhanger effort, but better use of Superman and broader scripting make *Atom Man* the better chapterplay. (Warner cassette)

### C A R T O O N THE MECHANICAL MONSTERS

(1941). The 17 Superman cartoons produced by Paramount adhere to a fairly rigid formula. *Mechanical Monsters* is no exception. What distinguishes this effort from the other cartoons is superior character animation (particularly of Lois and the mastermind), terrific background music (penned by Paramount tunesmith

Sammy Tinling) and a marvelous action sequence in which Superman takes on an entire robot brigade in hand-to-hand combat. For this confrontation, director Dave Fleischer storyboarded some remarkably dramatic "camera angles," which the animators vividly brought to life. *Mechanical Monsters* was the second cartoon in the series, and it's unfortunate that none of the subsequent animated efforts shows quite the same energy or imagination. (Warner cassette)

### T V E P I S O D E CRIME WAVE (1953).

This early black-and-white Superman TV episode delivers more Man of Steel action than five other episodes put together, and I can forgive the fact that many of its thrills are culled from earlier shows.

There's none of the cutesy-poo kiddie stuff which mars many of the TV storylines—just Superman, flying and fighting constantly as he runs to the ground the criminal genius responsible for organizing a reign of terror on the streets of Metropolis. (Warner cassette)

### M O V I E SUPERMAN—THE MOVIE (1977).

It's difficult to believe that, in just a few short years, the Man of Steel fell from his lofty perch as star of this multimillion-dollar epic to straight man for a painfully unfunny Richard Pryor. We should perhaps forget the debacle of *Superman III* (perhaps by casting all existing cassettes into the Phantom Zone) and choose to remember the initial Christopher Reeve starer as the definitive Superman movie.

Director Richard Donner managed a

neat blend of serious and comic elements in this superproduction. The Krypton scenes, starring Marlon Brando, Trevor Howard and Susannah York, can legitimately be described as majestic; the Smallville scenes have a lyrical quality and capture a poignancy almost unimaginable in such an undertaking; and the Metropolis scenes convey a lightning-paced but often ridiculous urban way of life frequently imagined to be real by those who don't live in a big city.

Under Donner's direction, Reeve's grasp of the title character is truly impressive. He knows when to play a scene with tongue in cheek (Lois' penthouse interview) and when to play the heroic stuff with granite-jawed sincerity (in contrast to Gene Hackman's casual maliciousness as Lex Luthor). Margot Kidder is letter-perfect as Lois Lane; she's ideally cast as a plucky '70s career woman. And Valerie Perrine squeezes more laughs than might ordinarily be expected from her dumb-blonde characterization. (Warner cassette, LV disc)

—E.H.



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# PENN AND TELLER

*On Exploiting Home Video for Fun and Profit*

By Glenn Kenny

Face it. Interactive video is a scam. What's so interactive about using a half-hour tape of old football clips to spruce up what's nothing more or less than a board game? That may be your idea of fun (and if it is, I don't want to hear about it), but it sure as hell isn't interactive. It took the unclassifiable duo Penn and Teller to come up with the first truly interactive videocassette. *Cruel Tricks for Dear Friends* (Lorimar) is a collection of seven scams you can perpetrate on your loved ones. You can profit and have fun while pulling the wool over the eyes of those closest to you. All the tricks have one thing in common: You can't do them without the tape. "It's not called 'interactive,'" growls Penn Jillette, the taller and more garrulous member of the duo, "because 'interactive' means 'not interactive' to people now. It's bull. It means children singing along at a birthday party."

Penn and Teller are on a roll these days. While those with more prosaic imaginations may see them as hip magicians (not a very hard thing to do considering the competition), they're more like vaudevillian philosopher kings—"two very eccentric guys who have learned to



do a couple of cool things," as they put it. The trickery that has wowed those who've seen their Broadway show (not to mention their appearances on *Saturday Night Live*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, a Run-DMC video and an Emmy-winning PBS special) is often as thought-provoking as it is astonishing. The *Cruel Tricks* tape, too, manages to stimulate the intellect as well as hone one's sense of greed.

The concept is simple. Your friend comes to visit and you offer to do a card trick for him or her. The friend balks—card tricks are so corny—so you sweeten the deal by making it a real money bet. You muff the trick, give your friend the money and suggest watching TV. (Meanwhile, you've already cued up a specially prepared portion of the tape.) There's a pretty good old movie on (or so it seems, it's really the tape). Soon the movie is interrupted by a news flash. In the middle of it, a newscaster holds up a card—the card your friend picked. Astonished, your friend pays up.

Or take another one. Your friend comes over. In the middle of your amiable chat, you assert that certain TV evangelists are actually using backward soundtracks (just like rock stars supposedly do) in order to disseminate Satanist propaganda. Your friend scoffs. You make a bet and show him a tape of a TV evangelist. Then you play it backward (explaining that you've got one of those high-end models that does that kind of thing), and sure enough there's the evangelist commanding his followers to "take crack in Beelzebub's name." ("The people at Lorimar blanched when they heard that," chuckles Penn.) Your friend, somewhat disturbed, but still an honorable bettor, hands over some cash.

While *Cruel Tricks* has its share of the prestidigitation for which Penn and Teller have become known, a lot of it is just sheer electronic trickery. "What this does," Teller says, "is exploit things that people take for granted; the fact that your guests will take for granted that what they see on TV is real. And that's a wide assumption."

"Philosophically, it's very interesting that doing these scams is like shooting fish in a barrel," Penn says. "For some reason, doctored videotape is absolutely inconceivable to some people. And it really shouldn't be. People have been lying to us on TV for over 30 years now. It should be an old concept."

"Certain scams on the tape take advantage of the victim's suspicion that technology is unlimited," Teller notes. "The vidicopy segment [in which you trick your friend into believing that a special tape allows your TV to function as a copy machine] is almost possible."

*Cruel Tricks* has a funky feel—it was actually shot in New York City, in the Lower East Side apartment of their friend (and *Cruel Tricks* co-writer) Eddie Gorodetsky (who has written for *Letterman* and *SCTV* as well). While Penn assumes his most ingratiatingly hostile persona throughout the tape, the duo insist that *Cruel Tricks* is not a product designed to exploit people's stupidity. All that money stuff is just a joke.

"The reality of *Cruel Tricks* is, you do this trick, you blow your friends away, and then nine times out of 10 you show them the part of the tape that explains how it's done," Penn says. "There's a

wonderful enjoyment in having a secret and then sharing it. The reason you started learning magic tricks when you were 12 was to show them to your parents and then tell them how it's done. Except that, for the most part, most magic tricks are more fun to show than to explain. It's like the difference between listening to the Sex Pistols and then going through a musical score of one of their songs. But *Cruel Tricks* is seven tricks where knowing how they're done is part of the fun."

While they've had the idea for the tape for over five years, the first chance Penn and Teller got to try the cruel tricks concept was on their PBS special, *Penn and Teller Go Public*, where they did a less slick version of the card trick/newscaster scam. The *Go Public*

version became a cult favorite, with many fans taping it and pulling it on their friends, complete with the minor card flourishes it requires. Strangely enough, PBS didn't think it would go over, and for a surprising reason. "I'm not saying this to public TV's discredit," Penn says, "because, after all, they did put it on. But their feeling was that a TV audience couldn't get it together enough to shuffle a deck of cards. That is what everyone has taken as a given when putting together something for video. Whereas we're taking it as a given that it's not a lot to ask of a viewer." Other tricks, he notes, require a different kind of "skill." "Things like the TV evangelist—we don't give people a script for that, to explain the idea before they do it. If you want to pull it off, you ad lib. We heard about one guy who does about 20 minutes of explaining before he shows that segment. People are perfectly capable of doing that; it's very simple for them. And the thing is that no one knows it. It's sad that Americans don't have a rep for being really sharp, but the fact is, we have a lot of smart friends and we're not alone."

And that, in a nutshell, is the concept of *Cruel Tricks*. The interactivity of this tape may lead to some better interaction among you and your friends—at the very least it should get some conversation going. In the meantime, Penn and Teller are keeping extremely busy. They're writing a book, as yet untitled ("I wouldn't mind

not having a title," Teller frowns, "if we had some copy."). Penn has a band called Bongos, Bass and Bob; Penn is Bass, and Teller sometimes sits in on keyboards. "An acoustic speed mariachi psychedelic combo," Penn calls it. "We try to encapsulate the urban intelligentsia with a 15-year-old's grasp of the instrument. We hit things and yell, but we have jokes about the Russian Tea Room." And they're gearing up to start a movie, *Penn and Teller Get Killed*. Plot line? "Yeah," Penn says. "I can give you a real simple plot line: Penn and Teller get killed, as well as have a yuk a minute. We play as close to Penn and Teller in this movie as the Beatles played themselves in *A Hard Day's Night*—not as the Beatles played themselves in *Let It Be*."

In the midst of all this activity, they're planning a *Cruel Tricks* sequel, which Penn has described as "Revenge—this time the cruel trickster will take a bath!" So while the owner of a *Cruel Tricks* cassette may be laughing now, he or she may have to reap what they've sown. Penn and Teller ought to put a warning label on the tape. □



Above: Penn smirks while Teller flourishes in vitro. Previous page: scenes from their Broadway show, including Penn's race-to-the-finish reading of "Casey at the Bat," wherein Teller hangs on every word.

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# IRVING BERLIN: STILL



By Roy Hemming

Irving Berlin has been setting milestones longer than any other popular American composer. Of course, some say he's done it because he's *lived* longer. This May 11th, Berlin celebrates his 100th birthday. Yes, 100.

He's been called the man who, more than anyone else, "invented" the kind of pop song that has dominated American musicals on stage and screen for the past seven decades. Beginning around 1910, Berlin wrote jazz-influenced songs that veered sharply away from European operetta traditions and set a simpler, more "natural" pop style—one that is still instantly recognized throughout the world as American. Even after rock music took over in the '50s, Berlin's songs survived as what's now known as "classic pop."

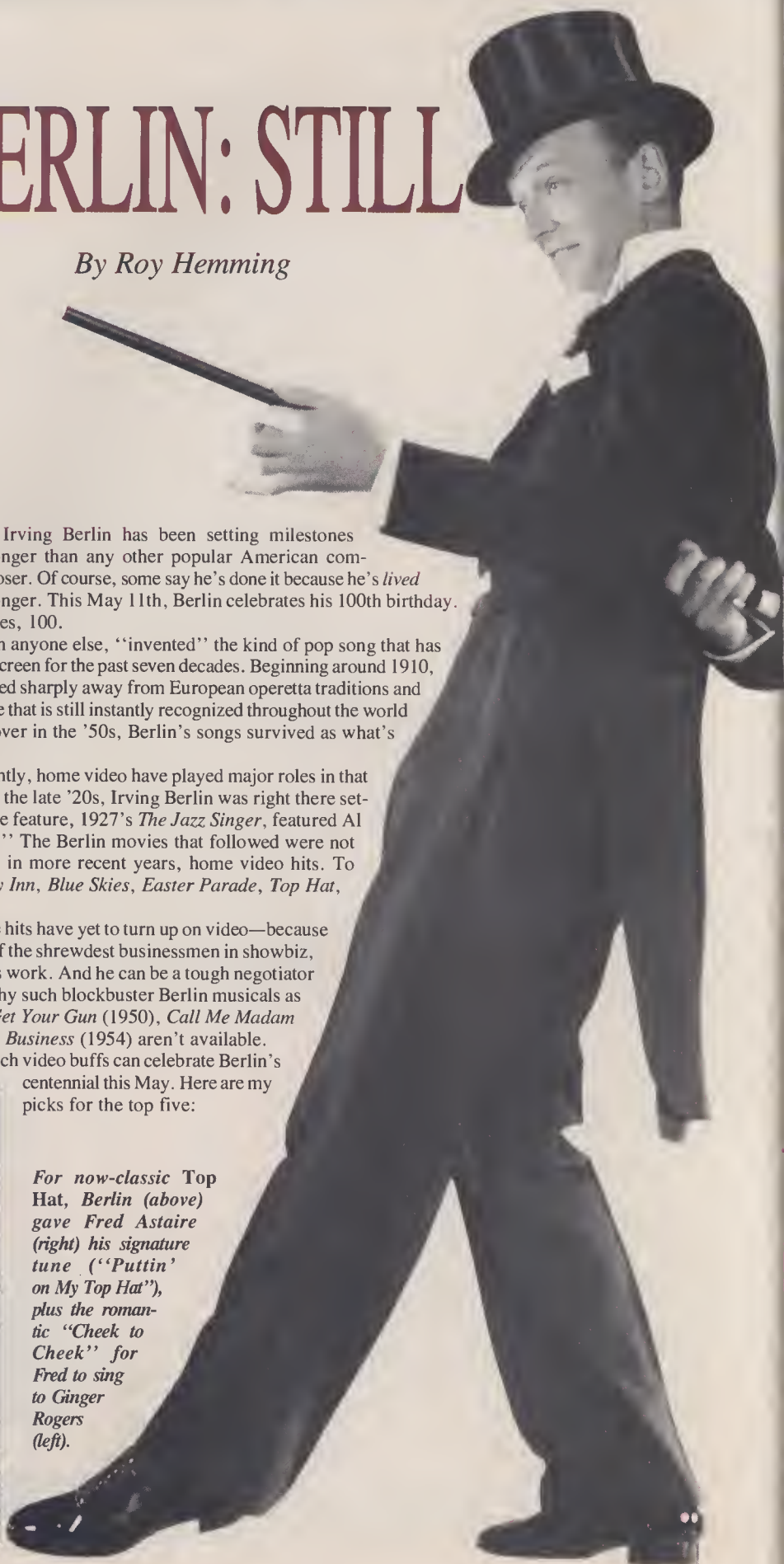
Audio recordings, movies and, most recently, home video have played major roles in that survival. When movies found their voice in the late '20s, Irving Berlin was right there setting the standards. The first successful talkie feature, 1927's *The Jazz Singer*, featured Al Jolson singing a Berlin song, "Blue Skies." The Berlin movies that followed were not only boxoffice bonanzas but also became, in more recent years, home video hits. To name just a few: *White Christmas*, *Holiday Inn*, *Blue Skies*, *Easter Parade*, *Top Hat*, *Follow the Fleet* and *This Is the Army*.

Ironically, some of Berlin's biggest movie hits have yet to turn up on video—because of Berlin himself. Always regarded as one of the shrewdest businessmen in showbiz, Berlin has carefully guarded the rights to his work. And he can be a tough negotiator where video rights are concerned. That's why such blockbuster Berlin musicals as *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950), *Call Me Madam* (1953) and *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954) aren't available.

But there are still plenty of others with which video buffs can celebrate Berlin's centennial this May. Here are my picks for the top five:



For now-classic *Top Hat*, Berlin (above) gave Fred Astaire (right) his signature tune ("Puttin' on My Top Hat"), plus the romantic "Cheek to Cheek" for Fred to sing to Ginger Rogers (left).



# 'SAYING IT WITH MUSIC' AT 100



*Sending up the high life via Berlin songs: Clark Gable (above) in *Idiot's Delight's* "Puttin' on the Ritz"; Astaire, Judy Garland as *Easter Parade's* "Couple of Swells."*



**TOP HAT.** The *creme de la creme* of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals, with its glistening B&W cinematography, art deco designs and airheaded comedy. But it's also such durable songs as "Check to Check," "Isn't This a Lovely Day to Be Caught in the Rain" and "No Strings" that keep this as fresh a musical-comedy romp as it was when first released in 1935. (RKO, VidAmerica cassettes)

**FOLLOW THE FLEET.** Very different in style from *Top Hat*, this rowdier 1936 musical casts Astaire as a sailor and Rogers as a dance hall hostess (with a pre-star Lucille Ball and Betty Grable among her colleagues). Berlin's songs range from the lowdown "Let Yourself Go" to the superelegant "Let's Face the Music and Dance." (RKO, Fox Hills cassettes)

**HOLIDAY INN.** Although best known as the movie in which Bing Crosby introduced "White Christmas," this 1942 musical is actually a tribute to eight different holidays throughout the year—with Berlin songs for each of them. One of the weakest, "Say It with Fireworks," luckily gets lost behind a snappy Fred Astaire tap routine that is

reputedly the fastest precision dance he or anyone else ever filmed. (MCA cassette, LV disc)

**THIS IS THE ARMY.** All the profits from this lively 1941 tribute to America's WWII fighting men and women went to the Army Relief Fund, which is how it ended up as a public-domain video entry (with prints whose color and quality vary from distributor to distributor). Berlin himself croaks his way through an unforgettable "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" and Kate Smith thrillingly belts out what some consider our second national anthem, Berlin's "God Bless America"—among an almost continuous, flag-waving parade of songs and comedy sketches. Then-US Army Lt. Ronald Reagan, in the romantic lead, neither sings nor makes laughs. (Budget, Video Images cassettes)

**EASTER PARADE.** As colorful a parade of singing and dancing as MGM ever turned out, this only teaming of Judy Garland and

Fred Astaire offers some 16 vintage and new (for 1948) Berlin songs, such as "Snooky Ookums," "Shakin' the Blues Away" and "Stepping Out with My Baby." (MGM/UA cassette)

There are also some individual gems in movies that don't have all-Berlin scores. For example, Berlin's "Puttin' on the Ritz" gave Clark Gable his only chance to kick up his heels in a dance routine (a hilarious one, too) in 1939's anti-war comedy, *Idiot's Delight* (MGM/UA cassette). That same song also gets an unforgettable workout in Mel Brooks' 1974 *Young Frankenstein* (CBS/Fox cassette, LV disc). And one of Al Jolson's signature tunes, Berlin's "Let Me Sing and I'm Happy," has a prominent place in both *The Jolson Story* and *Jolson Sings Again* (RCA/Columbia cassettes).

Now, if Irving Berlin would only give us a centenary birthday present by helping along the video release of those holdouts he himself has helped keep on the shelf. □



*"Say It with Music" was one of Berlin's biggest song hits—and he continued to do just that for decades, composing tunes for Astaire and Rogers' Follow the Fleet and many other movies now on home video.*



## ***APEL Lab Tests of The Latest Video Equipment***

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#### **SUMMARY**

#### **RCA Monitor/Receiver, Model 31100**

1988 is turning out to be an extraordinary year for monitor/receivers. Just when we think we've seen the ultimate in picture quality—when we think that a particular aspect of that quality has been pushed as high as it can go—along comes another set that pushes standards just a bit higher. RCA's new 31-inch monitor/receiver is just such a set, and it's stunning. The 31100 is capable of delivering not 500, not 600, but 640 lines of horizontal resolution. This renders the 31100 more than ready for any high-definition video source—laser disc, Super VHS, ED Beta—and gives it resolution to spare.

As for the actual picture tube, well, if you think 31 inches (measured diagonally) provides only a marginal improvement in viewing area over a 27-inch screen, wait'll you see this set. The tube of the 31100 features a square-corner screen, for a total of 450 square inches of viewing space. That's 32% more than you get from a 27-inch screen with rounded corners.

Viewing size and resolution aside, other areas of picture quality are equally impressive. Excellent color convergence, color quality and black level retention combine to produce an incredibly vivid image that has to be seen to be appreciated.

While the set's built-in audio amplifier provided excellent frequency response and very low distortion, the MTS decoder (for receiving stereo broadcasts) came in a little low in stereo separation. Since we very rarely come across a built-in MTS decoder that's entirely successful in its task, we can't fault this set too much.

Watching TV on a screen as large as this is probably the next best thing to theater viewing. While projection TVs have come a long way in the past few years, some people find the quality of the projection image lacking in the kind of crispness associated with direct-view sets. Sets like this one show just what those people mean. This large direct-view set has extraordinary clarity; it practically cries out to be hooked up to an equally high-resolution video source (this set comes equipped with the S-connector hookup, making it S-VHS- or ED Beta-ready). RCA has wowed us with this set; take a look at it yourself and you may be equally astonished.

#### **Features**

If you have any other RCA video or audio components, the unified remote supplied with this monitor/receiver will operate them as well as the set. The cable-compatible quartz tuner locks into as many as 149 broadcast and cable channels. An auto-programming feature quickly "memorizes" the active channels in your area. When you press the channel up/down buttons, the set will only scan through those stations; you won't be bothered by the snow of non-active channels.

In addition to the built-in MTS decoder, the set features a surround sound circuit. Not to be confused with Dolby Surround, this is basically a sound-expansion feature that simulates stereo on non-MTS broadcasts.

The on-screen displays provide visual indications of all phases of the set's operation and aid you in the setting of the sleep timer (which turns the set off after a pre-set length of time) and clock. The set has dual antenna inputs as well as a stereo input/output monitor panel, including two sets of direct audio/video inputs. The aforementioned S-connector is found here as well.

#### **Controls**

Very few of the operating controls for this monitor/receiver are exposed during normal operation. These include volume controls, channel pushbuttons, a power switch and a video 1/2 input selector. Indicator lights that switch on or off during normal operation include stereo, SAP and SAP-SET (which lets you know when an SAP [second audio program] soundtrack is actually there to be heard, since many stations capable of broadcasting an SAP channel don't always do it).

Other front panel controls are behind an auxiliary door panel. There are many unique picture controls here, including a notch filter switch (which reduces picture interference effects due to color and black-and-white signal intermingling) and a velocity modulation switch (which enhances picture edge definition). More familiar is the auto-color button, which brings the color back to its factory setting after you've changed it.

The "video" button sequentially brings up six on-screen displays of various video functions (color, tint, etc.) which are adjusted by pressing two nearby plus or minus buttons. Audio adjustment (bass and treble, for example) are handled the same way. The "set up" and "auto program" buttons are used for the automatic memorization and storing of active channels in your area.

Finally, the antenna pushbutton chooses which of the two available antenna signals should be fed to the TV receiver.

The multifunction remote control duplicates most of the front panel controls, permits direct access to any TV channel and allows you to set the sleep timer and clock.

The jack panel on the back of the set includes the two antenna terminals as well as a third coaxial connector intended for use in conjunction with a cable converter box. External speaker terminals and an external/internal speaker switch are here as well as the two sets of direct inputs, the S-connector and the direct output jacks.

## Test Results

Perhaps the most outstanding video performance characteristic of this set is its magnificent horizontal and vertical resolution—640 and 450 lines, respectively. The corresponding video frequency response measurement was 8.0 MHz—the highest APEL has tested. (Seems we're saying that almost every month!) All other video parameters were first-rate; while interlace was 60/40 instead of a perfect 50/50 (which is hardly ever found on direct-view screens this size anyway), this does not visibly detract from the excellence of the picture.

### LAB MEASUREMENTS:

#### RCA Monitor/Receiver

Model Number: 31100

Serial Number: PP-2

### VIDEO SECTION

<b>MAXIMUM USABLE LUMINANCE</b>	<b>75 Footlamberts</b>
<b>RESOLUTION</b> (horizontal/vertical)	<b>640/450 Lines</b>
<b>CONVERGENCE</b> (center/corners)	<b>0/.2%</b>
<b>VIDEO FREQUENCY RESPONSE</b>	<b>8.0 MHz</b>
<b>INTERLACE</b>	<b>60/40</b>
<b>TRANSIENT RESPONSE</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>BLACK LEVEL RETENTION</b>	<b>95%</b>
<b>COLOR QUALITY</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

### AMPLIFIER SECTION

<b>MAXIMUM OUTPUT</b> (3% harmonic distortion) Speaker Output	<b>6.1 Watts</b>
<b>TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION</b> (1 kHz at -10 dB) Speaker Output	<b>.1%</b>
<b>SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO</b> (A-weighted) Speaker Output	<b>57.8 dB</b>
<b>FREQUENCY RESPONSE</b> Speaker Output	<b>20 Hz to 20 kHz</b>

### MTS DECODER SECTION

<b>SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO</b> (at 1,000 uV, A-weighted) Stereo (left/right) SAP	<b>58.6/59.9 dB</b> <b>63.7 dB</b>
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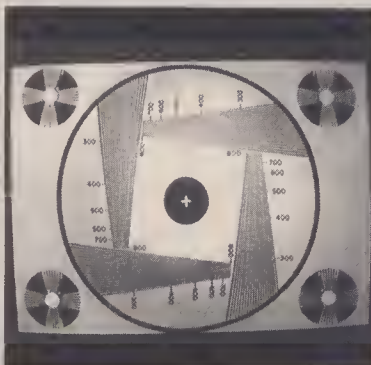
The TV reception capability of the 31100 earned equally high marks. Even with signals equivalent to fringe-area conditions, pictures were watchable, relatively free of video noise (which often manifests itself as snow on the screen).

All audio measurements were made in the simulcast mode, using the audio 1 inputs. The built-in amp delivered 6.1 watts per channel at 1 kHz, with both channels driving 8-ohm speaker loads. Distortion at this power output level measured .1%, which is very good. The signal-to-noise ratio from the amp was an adequate 57.8 dB, but frequency response was excellent, measuring flat across the entire range of human hearing.

The MTS decoder section exhibited good frequency response in the stereo mode (extending out to 13 kHz, close to the established limit of broadcast stereo) and showed a signal-to-noise ratio of just under 60 dB. This is not audiophile sound, to be sure, but MTV and VH-1 will still sound better than they would on a non-MTS set. SAP and mono results were adequate.

But that's about the only parameter of the set to which that term can be applied. In every other respect, the 31100 is a big winner. Once it's in your viewing room its extraordinary picture will enthrall you. —Len Feldman

### Resolution



Mono **56.5 dB**

### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	<b>.30/.39%</b>
SAP	<b>.57%</b>
Mono	<b>.48%</b>

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(at -20 dB, 100% modulation)	
Stereo	<b>38 Hz to 13 kHz</b>
SAP	<b>23 Hz to 7 kHz</b>
Mono	<b>28 Hz to 4 kHz</b>

### CHANNEL SEPARATION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB, 100% modulation)	
Stereo (left/right)	<b>15.0/14.5 dB</b>

### ADDITIONAL DATA

<b>PICTURE SIZE</b>	<b>31 Inches (diag.)</b>
<b>POWER REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>180 Watts</b>
<b>DIMENSIONS</b> (HxWxD, in inches)	<b>37 1/8 x 34 3/4 x 23</b>
<b>SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE</b>	<b>\$2,495</b>

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL  
(Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

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## SUMMARY

### Mitsubishi S-VHS-C Camcorder, Model HS-C30U

While Mitsubishi's considerable achievements in big-screen TVs—both rear projection and direct view—have been well documented in these pages, the company's efforts in the camcorder field have been scant up until now. So we were a little surprised at just what a fine piece of equipment its debut S-VHS-C camcorder is. This is a knockout camcorder—the first we've tested that completely lives up to S-VHS expectations, delivering by far the most detailed picture of any model we've seen.

While almost all of the S-VHS camcorders we've looked at have been able to produce 400 lines of horizontal resolution in the camera section, none has been able to take that fine resolution into the record/play realm, where it really counts. The HS-C30U does. The camera section itself produces 425 lines; through the direct video output, it plays back at 400 lines. That's better resolution than you get from a broadcast signal of a TV show, with detail and crispness that's breathtaking. This camcorder allows playback through the RF input of your TV; but resolution decreases considerably with this method, so the direct video input (or S-connector, if your set is equipped with one) is your best option.

Other video parameters tested on this model were very good to excellent, although there was a slight error in color saturation and accuracy. We've been finding this quite a bit in the first generation of S-VHS camcorders, and while it's not a horrible flaw, we hope it's cleared up in subsequent models.

But all things considered—the fact, for example, that such excellent picture quality has been packed into a camcorder that weighs just over three pounds—the HS-C30U is a remarkable achievement, well worth considering.

## Features

This camcorder operates at both the SP and EP speeds. The compact VHS cassette (which can be played back through the camcorder or through an S-VHS deck once it's been placed in a special adapter) will record for 20 minutes in SP, 60 in EP. The camcorder has auto focus, auto iris and auto white balance. Auto focus can be overridden if you prefer to focus manually.

Special features include a high-speed shutter (going up to  $\frac{1}{1000}$  of a second, allowing blur-free slo-mo replays of action scenes), bidirectional speed search (three times nor-

mal speed in SP, seven times in EP) and an address search system, with a counter indicator in the electronic viewfinder. Date and time can be superimposed on your recordings, and there's a fade button that helps you make smooth scene transitions.

The electronic viewfinder serves as a built-in black-and-white monitor during recording and playback and offers a wide variety of helpful displays during recording. White balance status, tape counter/time remaining, speed, operating mode (S-VHS or standard VHS), shutter speed and many other indicators appear in the viewfinder.

The supplied battery pack powers the camcorder for about an hour. The model can also be powered by an AC adapter/battery charger. Other accessories included in the package include a cassette adapter, an S-VHS-C tape to get you started, an A/V output cable (which incorporates an S-connector that separates color and brightness signals and feeds them to a similarly equipped TV set) and a shoulder strap.

## Controls

The controls and switches associated with the camera functions of the HS-C30U are primarily on the left side and front surface of the camcorder body. Up front, near the lens, are a fade button, shutter speed selector, backlight compensation button, auto/manual focus switch, white balance selection and date button. Counter reset buttons, S-VHS/standard VHS selection buttons and a review button are also here.

The power switch is conveniently located near the start/stop record button on the back of the handgrip section; it's a snap to start shooting. The 6:1 power zoom button is positioned on the handgrip so your forefinger and middle finger land on it naturally when you hold the camcorder. The A/V input is also on the handgrip section.

Buttons associated with VCR functions (play, rewind, etc.) are on the top surface of the camcorder. The right side has an external microphone jack and houses a small lithium battery that retains counter readings and date and time.

## Test Results

The minimum amount of light required for this camcorder to produce a 1-volt video signal is 10.3 lux. Best results come, of course, in a fairly well-lit room. Color contamination was minimal, measuring only 5 IRE. White balance was 10 IRE, about average, so colors will look fairly natural. While tests showed a slight amount of color inaccuracy, during the regular record/playback cycle, colors looked quite bright and sharp. (A slight shift of the red field toward yellow was measured by APEL in a vectorscope display.)

The most startling results were in the resolution measurements. The camera section produced 425 lines of horizontal resolution—a full 400 in the record/play cycle when measured through the direct video output. This is phenomenal picture detail. And if you have any doubts that direct video inputs are the way to go, take a look at the resolution figure when measured through the TV output—down a full 50 lines. 350 lines is still better than you've seen from any standard VHS camcorder, but why not go for the full advantage?

Signal-to-noise ratios were always well above 40 dB in optimum light levels; low light levels produced a picture that wasn't nearly as clean, but was still watchable. Using this camcorder in well-lit situations will

produce not only a well-detailed picture, but also one that's free of grain or snow.

As far as audio is concerned, well, there's no such thing as a Hi-Fi VHS-C camcorder, and there never will be. So the audio signal-to-noise ratio of 46 dB is not particularly surprising, or even disappointing. Fine audio is not the purpose of this camcorder; it gives you audio you can hear clearly, and that's satisfactory.

In our hands-on experiments with the HS-C30U, we were impressed with its ease of use, the high-speed shutter and the very helpful viewfinder displays. All those would make it an admirable camcorder in itself. The addition of its excellent S-VHS picture quality makes the HS-C30U an exceptional piece of equipment. —Len Feldman

## LAB MEASUREMENTS:

### Mitsubishi S-VHS-C

Model Number: HS-C30U

Serial Number: Control #3071

## CAMERA SECTION

MINIMUM ILLUMINATION	10.3 Lux
HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION	425 Lines
COLOR CONTAMINATION	5 IRE
WHITE BALANCE	10 IRE
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS:	
Red-Field Chroma, AM	
(optimum/min. light levels)	43.2/37.6 dB
Luminance	
(optimum/min. light levels)	40.5/39.0 dB
MINIMUM FOCAL DISTANCE	42 inches
( $\frac{1}{16}$ inch, macro)	
LENS APERTURE	f/1.2
ZOOM RATIO	6:1
FOCAL LENGTH	8.5mm to 51mm

## AUDIO SECTION

MAXIMUM MIKE OUTPUT	.48 Volts
EXTERNAL MIKE SENSITIVITY	15mV
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	46 dB

## COMBINED PERFORMANCE

HORIZONTAL RESOLUTIONS	
(S-VHS, video/TV out)	400/350 Lines
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS	
Red-Field Chroma, AM (video out)	
(optimum/min. light levels)	43.4/35.8 dB
Luminance (video out)	
(optimum/min. light levels)	42.3/40.5 dB
Red-Field Chroma, AM (TV out)	
(optimum/min. light levels)	42.3/38.4 dB
Luminance (TV out)	
(optimum/min. light levels)	42.5/41.4 dB

## ADDITIONAL DATA

WEIGHT	
(including battery and tape)	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ Pounds
DIMENSIONS	
(HxWxD, in inches)	6x4 $\frac{1}{4}$ x10
POWER ZOOM SPEED	7 Seconds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$1,600

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).



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	CC350 5 VHS	VC2200U FS.	VC0800U Pix n Pix Multipix
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PV2801 On Screen	PV4860 4 Hd HiFi MTS	VG7575 O.S.D.	VR390 4 Hd O.S.D.
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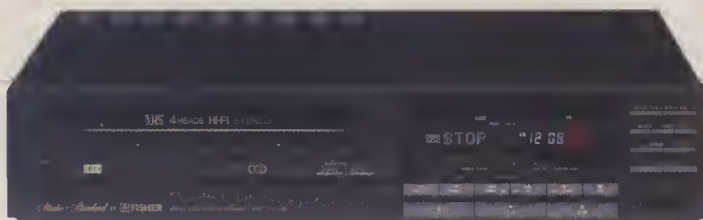
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## Fisher's Latest Hi-Fi Deck



### SUMMARY

#### Fisher VCR, Model FVH-5550

A VHS Hi-Fi VCR with HQ picture circuitry and a built-in MTS decoder usually costs a pretty penny. This model, Fisher's latest high-end deck, retails for just \$600, a price that's sure to be marked down by competitive retailers. That's the good news. The bad news is that this deck doesn't deliver the top-notch performance we're accustomed to seeing on the current generation of multifeatured VHS VCRs.

The deck's video performance was not what we'd call horrible, but it wasn't sparkling either. Video frequency response was the main complaint, diminishing by 9.30 dB at the standard VHS frequency of 2 MHz. This kind of signal degeneration results in a picture that's not as detailed and crisp as it should be. Video signal-to-noise ratios were fair to excellent, however, so the clarity of the picture may mitigate the lack of detail.

In the Hi-Fi audio department, a low audio output level produced a lower-than-average signal-to-noise ratio (69.4 dB in the SP mode). APEL engineers say that this is an "acceptable" measurement, and they're correct, but rabid audiophiles may not agree. But they won't argue with the Hi-Fi frequency response, which was flat across the entire range of human hearing.

The built-in MTS decoder did fairly well in the stereo mode, showing adequate frequency response and separation. SAP and mono readings were, as usual, less than perfect, but not a major worry.

While the video frequency response measurements came as something of a shock—we're used to seeing much better numbers in this category—they don't necessarily make this deck a bad buy. If you're an ultrademanded customer when it comes to picture quality, steer clear of this deck. If a picture is just a picture to you, the FVH-5550 may be worth looking into.

### Features

This is a four-head VCR with three tape speeds—SP (standard play, two hours with a T-120 tape), LP (long play, four hours) and EP (extended play, six hours). Special effects include fast picture search, freeze-frame viewing and frame-by-frame picture advance. The deck automatically powers itself when a cassette is inserted; if the erase tab has been removed from the tape, playback begins automatically.

The timer allows you to program six events over a one-year period (but just try finding a *TV Guide* that will give you next year's listings); there's also one-touch timer recording.

The TV tuner can receive up to 122 VHF, UHF and cable channel frequencies. On-screen programming helps take the confusion out of time-shifting. Other features include the aforementioned MTS decoder, Hi-Fi audio and something we haven't seen

before: a "repeat playback" feature that allows you to repeat any section of the tape you choose. This feature is similar to the A-B repeat feature found on many compact disc players. It should be useful to many viewers of recorded sporting events who want to see a particular play over and over again.

### Controls

The front panel of this deck offers no surprises: power button to the left of the recording slot, tape transport controls to the right. It's a standard VHS deck configuration, logically designed. Farther to the right are tape speed controls, a quick timer record button, counter reset button, TV/VCR switch and others. The display area of the deck shows the selected channel, time, programming data and tape counter numerals. The current function status of the machine is presented in words rather than symbols on this display area.

Secondary controls for audio functions, channel presetting, tracking and so on are behind a flip-down section at the bottom of the front panel. The rear of the VCR is equipped with antenna input and output connectors, direct audio/video ins and outs and a channel 3/4 RF output selector switch.

### Test Results

Video frequency response, whether tested from the direct video output or the TV demodulated output, was poor—down by 9.30 dB at the SP speed from the direct video out, for example (Fig. 1). That kind of degeneration is something we'd expect at the EP speed, but here it's kind of disconcerting. The video signal-to-noise ratios were distinguished by one excellent reading: red-field chroma was an extraordinary 48 dB when measured via the TV output. Given the fact that frequency response was also slightly better via the TV output, we'd have to go back on our standard advice and recommend that for this model, connection via the RF

### LAB MEASUREMENTS:

#### Fisher VCR

Model Number: FVH-5550

Serial Number: T12577-8747

### VIDEO SECTION

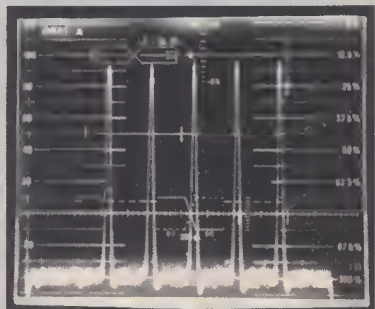
#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 2 MHz)

Video Output	
SP	-9.30 dB
LP	-10.5 dB
EP	-9.86 dB
TV Output	
SP	-8.94 dB
LP	-9.86 dB
EP	-9.30 dB

#### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	44.4/37.2 dB
LP (AM/PM)	42.7/37.9 dB
EP (AM/PM)	39.2/35.6 dB
Red-Field Chroma (TV output)	
SP (AM/PM)	48.0/40.8 dB
LP (AM/PM)	46.3/41.6 dB
EP (AM/PM)	39.0/35.5 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.9/43.0/43.0 dB
LP (100/50/10 IRE)	39.9/39.8/39.9 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	37.8/38.0/38.1 dB
Luminance (TV output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	40.4/40.2/39.5 dB
LP (100/50/10 IRE)	38.0/37.9/37.6 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	36.1/36.1/35.7 dB

### Stairstep Linearity



output may well be the way to go after all! Signal-to-noise ratios were good overall, meaning you'll get a picture that's unsullied by spurious video noise.

Stairstep linearity (the deck's ability to reproduce varying shades between black and white) was excellent, with maximum deviation from linearity never exceeding 3%, at either the SP or EP speeds. Color accuracy, to cite another good measurement, was close to perfect.

The  $\sin^2$  pulse and bar test shows how the two parts of the video signal—chrominance (color) and luminance (brightness)—are timed relative to each other. The sharper the corners on the test pattern (Fig. 2), the more

"in sync" the two signals. In this case, results were average.

Audio Hi-Fi frequency response was superb: flat across the frequency spectrum from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. But APEL noted that audio output for a recording made at 0 dB was lower than usual (a mere .44 volts). That means the residual noise level relative to that output will be higher, which accounts for the less-than-stunning audio signal-to-noise ratios this deck showed.

The conventional audio track gave a higher-than-average frequency response (out to 13 kHz); it's quite adequate for recording spoken-word or monophonic soundtracks.

The built-in MTS decoder's frequency

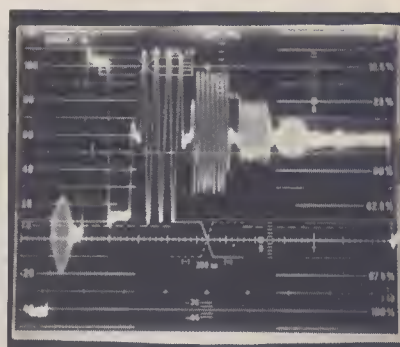


Fig. 1. Freq response: below average.

response extended far enough to be acceptable—11 kHz, just 3 kHz short of the limits of broadcast stereo. Separation fell consistently in the area of 20 dB, fairly good imaging if you're listening through the built-in speakers of your monitor/receiver. SAP and mono results were predictably

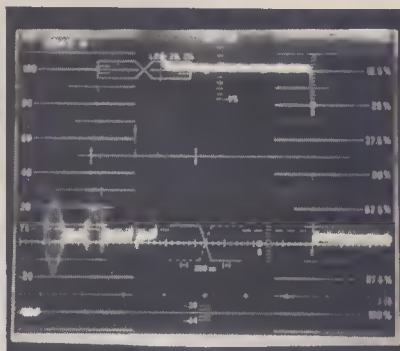


Fig. 2.  $\sin^2$  pulse and bar test.

lackluster, but again, they're acceptable.

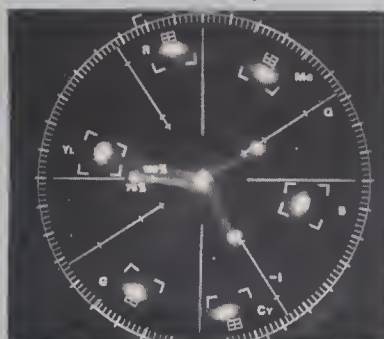
The convenience features and ease of use this deck provides increase its value to a certain extent. But in general the picture quality (so limited by the video frequency response) did not impress us. Still, this deck has some attractive things about it, and the price is right.

—Len Feldman

## ABOUT THESE TEST REPORTS

Each piece of video equipment we test is a factory-fresh production model—the same quality as you would buy in a store. After each product has been tested by APEL—Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory, a leading independent testing facility headed by engineer Frank Barr—it goes to technical editor Len Feldman, an internationally recognized authority with more than 30 years' experience testing home entertainment products. He interprets the data and performs hands-on use tests of each piece of equipment, combining personal, practical experience with the most objective technical data available anywhere.

### Color Accuracy



## AUDIO SECTION

### OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional (SP/LP/EP)	.34/.32/.32 Volts
Hi-Fi (all speeds)	.44 Volts

### THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional (SP/LP/EP)	2.6/2.8/2.8%
Hi-Fi (SP/LP/EP)	.12/.13/.11%

### WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional	
SP (avg/peak)	.30/.35%
LP (avg/peak)	.58/.60%
EP (avg/peak)	.65/.70%
Hi-Fi	
SP (avg/peak)	.015/.017%
LP (avg/peak)	.010/.011%
EP (avg/peak)	.017/.018%

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional	
SP	80 Hz to 13 kHz
LP	70 Hz to 8.6 kHz
EP	62 Hz to 5.8 kHz
Hi-Fi (all speeds)	20 Hz to 20 kHz

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Conventional (SP/LP/EP)	45.1/45.5/45.0 dB
Hi-Fi (SP/LP/EP)	69.4/74.9/72.9 dB

### HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)

Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	
SP	.79/.31%
LP	.88/.44%
EP	.97/.55%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	
SP	.72/.74/.75%
LP	.06/.09/.09%
EP	.32/.34/.52%

### HI-FI CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)

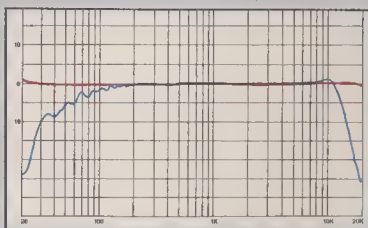
SP	62.2/64.9 dB
LP	61.7/63.3 dB
EP	61.5/63.9 dB

## MTS DECODER SECTION

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(at 100% modulation)	
Stereo (left/right)	60.1/60.3 dB
SAP	74 dB
Mono	60.5 dB

### Hi-Fi Frequency Response



### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.80/.48%
SAP	.58%
Mono	.23%

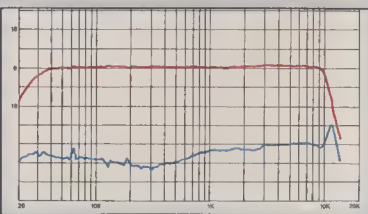
### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)

Stereo (both channels)	28 Hz to 11 kHz
SAP	40 Hz to 3 kHz
Mono	28 Hz to 3 kHz

### CHANNEL SEPARATION (at -20 dB)

Stereo (left/right)	22/21 dB
---------------------	----------

### MTS Stereo Response



## ADDITIONAL DATA

### POWER REQUIREMENTS

29 Watts

### FAST-FORWARD TIME

(T-120 tape) 4 Min., 10 Sec.

### FAST-REWIND TIME

(T-120 tape) 4 Min., 15 Sec.

### DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches) 3 1/8 x 17 1/8 x 13 1/4

### WEIGHT

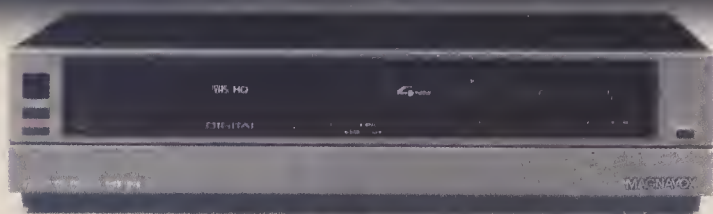
14 1/2 Pounds

### SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

\$600

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

## Magnavox Adds Digital Effects



### SUMMARY

#### Magnavox VCR, Model VR9670AT01

This new VCR from Magnavox is about as full-featured as a standard VHS deck can get. Standard high-end features, such as VHS Hi-Fi audio, HQ picture enhancement circuitry and an MTS decoder for receiving stereo broadcasts, are all included in this package. The VR9670 also has a full complement of digital special effects: picture-in-picture (which allows you to watch a tape while monitoring another video source in a small inset picture on the screen); digital freeze of tape or broadcast picture; a channel search feature that divides the screen into four quadrants, each one showing a freeze-frame from a different channel; and more.

In our tests, the digital effects all worked well, and the Hi-Fi audio section was excellent. Unfortunately, basic video performance was something less than what we've come to expect on standard VHS machines, with video frequency response down a full 8 dB at 2 MHz, the standard frequency at which the VHS signal peaks. This three-speed VCR does not deliver the full picture detail possible within the VHS format. Stairstep linearity, the ability of the deck to reproduce all the shades of gray between black and white, was poor as well. The best video measurements were obtained in the signal-to-noise ratio category, where numbers were consistently solid. While this deck doesn't deliver the best picture detail, what it does deliver is fairly clean, uncompromised by annoying video snow.

Overall, this is a nicely designed and styled VCR, and while it's got a lot of features, it's fairly user-friendly. We only wish that the basic video performance of the VR9670 was on a par with the sophistication of its digital capabilities.

### Features

The digital effects on this VCR include digital freeze-frame, frame-by-frame advance, slow-motion, picture-in-picture, strobe (kind of a cross between frame-by-frame advance and slow-motion), multi-strobe (in which four sequential freeze-frames appear in four quadrants of the screen, at eight different selectable rates) and a channel search feature.

The forward and reverse auto-index feature automatically records an index signal at the beginning of each program on a tape. This lets you find your desired recording easily when you have more than one program on a tape.

More familiar features include one-touch recording, a seven-event/three-week programmable timer for unattended recording, automatic power when a tape is inserted and automatic cassette ejection even if the VCR isn't on.

While the VR9670 doesn't provide on-screen programming, the supplied remote control has an LCD display that walks you through timer programming. If you prefer

to set the timer via the deck's own control panel, of course, you have that option as well.

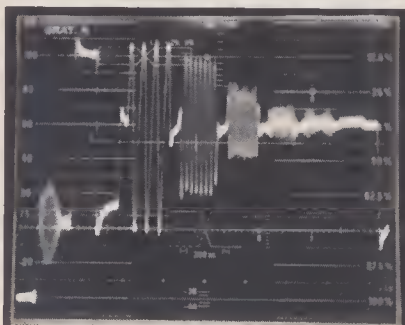


Fig. 1. Freq. response: below average.

### Controls

There aren't many immediately visible controls on this deck; only the power switch, cassette eject button, a few audio indicator lamps and the display area. The push of a small button opens a hinged door flap, revealing a two-sided control panel. The

back of the flap, now horizontally positioned, has the major tape transport buttons, the TV/VCR switch, the audio dub button (for adding narration or music to previously recorded tapes), the one-touch recording button, clock and timer setting controls, channel up/down buttons and the counter reset and memory rewind buttons.

Secondary controls on the vertical panel include those for various audio functions, digital special effects, picture sharpness (for boosting image detail) and Hi-Fi recording level. An MTS decoder selector (with which you choose the three MTS modes: stereo, SAP [separate audio program] or mono), an audio level switch (that also doubles as a tracking control), microphone inputs and a headphone output jack are also found here.

A small trap door on top of the VCR reveals controls for TV channel memorization, antenna system selection, tape length selection (so the time-remaining function on the display area will work accurately) and an edit switch, which boosts picture quality

### LAB MEASUREMENTS:

#### Magnavox VCR

Model Number: VR9670AT01

Serial Number: 56427630

### VIDEO SECTION

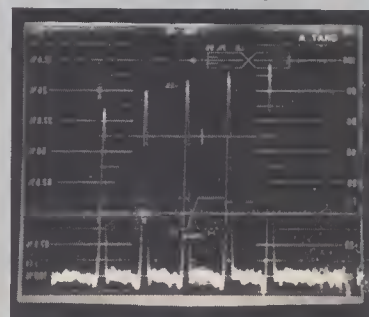
#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 2 MHz)

Video Output	
SP	-8.44 dB
LP	-11.8 dB
EP	-10.9 dB
TV Output	
SP	-8.60 dB
LP	-12.8 dB
EP	-11.8 dB

#### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	45.7/41.6 dB
LP (AM/PM)	44.9/40.8 dB
EP (AM/PM)	43.4/40.1 dB
Red-Field Chroma (TV output)	
SP (AM/PM)	45.1/41.5 dB
LP (AM/PM)	44.4/40.5 dB
EP (AM/PM)	43.2/39.9 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	44.8/45.0/44.4 dB
LP (100/50/10 IRE)	43.6/44.0/44.0 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	39.8/41.8/41.5 dB
Luminance (TV output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.0/42.2/42.4 dB
LP (100/50/10 IRE)	40.8/41.7/41.8 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	39.5/40.5/40.5 dB

### Stairstep Linearity





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for the express purpose of tape dubbing.

The rear panel of the deck has the usual VHF and UHF in and out terminals, direct video/audio output jacks, a channel 3/4 switch, a camera remote jack and an auxiliary connector that lets you hook up the VCR to compatible Magnavox products.

The remote control duplicates most of the VCR's functions and has the aforementioned LCD display, which, while not as elaborate as the deck's main display section, is very helpful during timer programming.

## Test Results

At the fastest tape speed (SP) video frequency response was down 8.44 dB at 2 MHz. That's below average for current VHS machines (a few years ago, it was the average). It's not a bad picture, but we're used to seeing better. Of course, response went down even further at the slower speeds, and reached its nadir at the intermediate speed (LP), where it was down 12.8 dB when measured via the TV output. In our hands-on experiments, however, the picture sharpness control boosted detail visibly without adding too much spurious noise in-

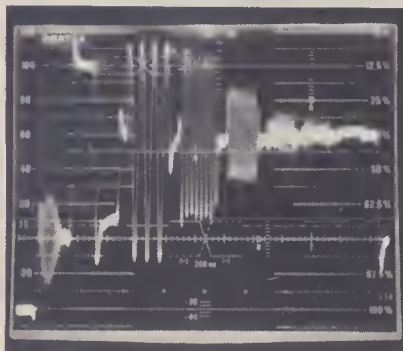


Fig. 2. Sharpness control at high setting.

to the picture. That's a function of the deck's signal-to-noise ratios, which were excellent (45.7 dB for red-field chroma AM, and 44.8 dB for luminance at the SP speed). If the frequency response had to go hand-in-hand with poor S/N ratios, the picture might be unwatchable. In this case, the excellence of one parameter goes a long way toward making the other more palatable. The good signal-to-noise ratios will also enable you to turn up the sharpness control of the VCR (Fig. 2) without introducing too much video noise into the picture.

While color accuracy and saturation were close to perfect, stairstep linearity (the ability of the deck to reproduce all the shades of gray between black and white) was pretty awful, with deviation from perfect linearity reaching as high as 19% when measured via the video output at the SP speed, where results should be best.

Results in the Hi-Fi audio department were more consistent. Frequency response was flat across the entire human hearing spectrum, and the signal-to-noise ratio at the SP speed was a CD-comparable 91.8 dB.

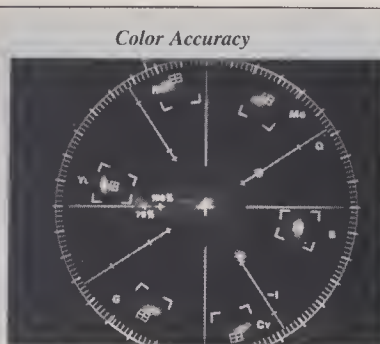
Harmonic distortion was all but inaudible, with levels between .11 and .13%. Conventional edge-track audio results were, as usual, conventional; they're acceptable mainly for recording spoken-word, non-stereo programming but won't do well for recording musical programs.

The MTS decoder section did a good job in the stereo mode, with frequency response going out to 13 kHz (1 kHz short of the broadcast stereo limit) and an acceptable signal-to-noise ratio of over 55 dB. The S/N ratio for SAP (which is set aside for bilingual soundtracks, radio feeds or whatever a sta-

tion wants to put there) was an outstanding 71 dB, but we can't imagine what for, since frequency response only went out to 4 kHz (which, we hasten to add, is perfectly adequate for SAP purposes).

APEL also checked the digital special effects of this model and found that they were all operational. I found them easy to initiate and somewhat useful—not to mention fun. While this deck's basic performance gets a mixed reaction from us, we can't fault Magnavox's efforts to put a lot of features into a well-designed, easy-to-operate package.

—Len Feldman



## AUDIO SECTION

### OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional (SP/LP/EP)	.42/.40/.40 Volts
Hi-Fi (all speeds)	2.90 Volts

### THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional (SP/LP/EP)	1.5/1.6/2.0%
Hi-Fi (all speeds)	3.0%

### WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional	
SP (avg/peak)	.50/.56%
LP (avg/peak)	.80/1.00%
EP (avg/peak)	.70/.78%
Hi-Fi	
SP (avg/peak)	.011/.014%
LP (avg/peak)	.009/.015%
EP (avg/peak)	.012/.016%

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional	
SP	50 Hz to 10 kHz
LP	40 Hz to 6.6 kHz
EP	48 Hz to 5.4 kHz
Hi-Fi	
SP	22 Hz to 20 kHz
LP	20 Hz to 20 kHz
EP	20 Hz to 20 kHz

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Conventional (SP/LP/EP)	47.4/49.4/45.0 dB
Hi-Fi (SP/LP/EP)	91.8/92.1/90.1 dB

### HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)

Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	
SP	.23/.32%
LP	.54/.38%
EP	.70/.54%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	
SP	.19/.13/.34%
LP	.13/.13/.11%
EP	.34/.36/.39%

### Hi-Fi CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)

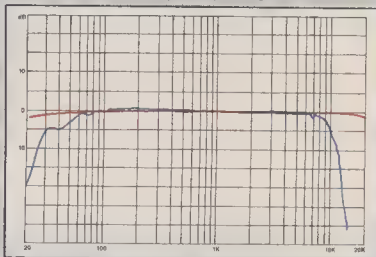
SP	66.9/64.4 dB
LP	67.9/66.0 dB
EP	66.0/63.9 dB

## MTS DECODER SECTION

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(at 100% modulation)	
Stereo (left/right)	55.4/55.6 dB
SAP	71 dB
Mono	55.9 dB

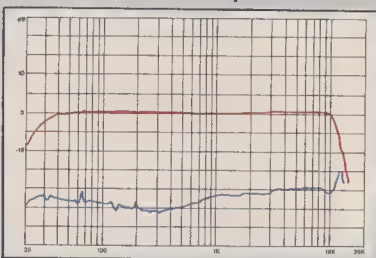
### Hi-Fi Frequency Response



### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.32/.36%
SAP	1.1%
Mono	.31%

### MTS Stereo Response



### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)

Stereo	28 Hz to 13 kHz
SAP	30 Hz to 4 kHz
Mono	30 Hz to 4 kHz

### CHANNEL SEPARATION (at -20 dB)

Stereo (left/right)	21.6/22.4 dB
---------------------	--------------

## ADDITIONAL DATA

### POWER REQUIREMENTS

	30.5 Watts
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### FAST-FORWARD TIME

(T-120 tape)	4 Min., 5 Sec.
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### FAST-REWIND TIME

(T-120 tape)	4 Min., 6 Sec.
--------------	----------------

### DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches)	4 1/8 x 17 x 14
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### WEIGHT

	30 1/2 Pounds
--	---------------

### SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

	\$1,249
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All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

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In California, (800) 428-1006.

## PROTON

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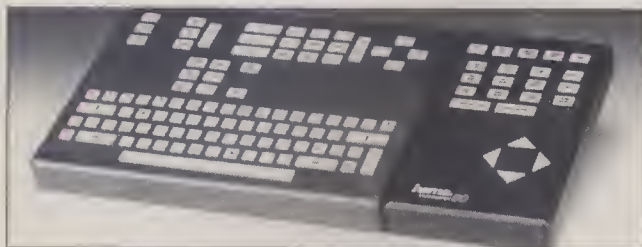
737 W. Artesia Blvd., Compton, CA 90220

For additional information, circle No. 2 on Reader Service Card.

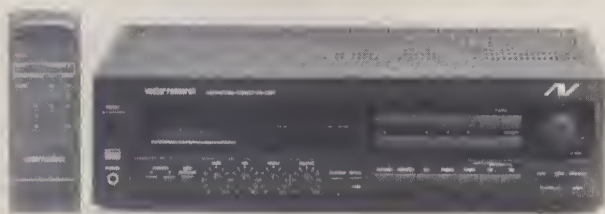
## The Latest In Video/Audio: VCRs, Camcorders And Accessories



*Vidikron brings the Darth Vader look to projection TVs.*



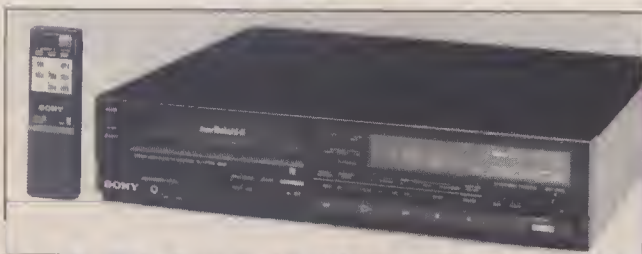
*The Hama character generator offers scrolling credits.*



*Vector Research's 50-watt A/V receiver.*



*Canon's S-VHS camcorder has a 10:1 zoom lens.*



*Sony keeps the Betas coming with two new affordable models.*

### **VIDIKRON**

#### **Projection TV**

**Model TGS-100 \$5,850**

This floor- or ceiling-mounted front-projection TV comes from an Italian-based manufacturer, and will arrive in US stores this spring. Available in white or charcoal gray finish, it uses three Hitachi seven-inch tubes, and is rated at 470 lumens of brightness by the manufacturer. Vidikron also makes screens for the 46-pound set (not included), which produces a video image of between 65 inches and 10 feet.

*Vidikron*

928 Broadway, Suite 405  
New York, NY 10010

### **HAMA**

#### **Character Generator**

**Video Script 50 \$1,050**

Due out later this spring, the Video Script 50 lets home video producers add up to 72 separate 30-symbol lines of type to their programs. The titler allows you to add scrolling credits in up to eight different colors (including black or white) in two different type styles (square or rounded). Its memory storage lets you program scroll speed, and includes circuitry to blink the letters.

*Hama, c/o Photo Systems Inc.*

7200 Huron River Dr.

Dexter, MI 48130

(800) 999-4042

### **VECTOR RESEARCH**

#### **A/V Receiver**

**Model VRX-5200R \$370**

This versatile 50-watts-per-channel A/V receiver includes two audio inputs and outputs designated for video sources, a separate A/V processing loop and a video monitor output. You can hook up a second set of speakers to the receiver's "B" speaker terminals, press a matrix button and enjoy surround sound.

*Vector Research*

1230 Calle Suerte

Camarillo, CA 93010

(805) 987-1312

### **CANON**

#### **Camcorder**

**Model F1000S \$2,400**

Canon's first S-VHS camcorder packs most of the features one would expect, including high shutter speeds, flying erase heads and an all-new Canon-designed 10:1 power zoom lens. This multilayer f1.4 lens operates with a dual-zone auto focus and a macro setting to adapt to a wide variety of applications. The 1/2-inch CCD (charge-coupled-device) image sensor packs 360,000 pixels for video images with up to 420 lines of horizontal resolution, according to the manufacturer. You can manually override the machine's automatic white balance and iris controls. Prompts within the 1/10-inch electronic viewfinder alert you to various functions and operating status.

*Canon, One Canon Plaza*

Lake Success, NY 11042

(516) 488-6700

### **SONY**

#### **Beta VCR**

**Model SL-HF360 \$600**

Sony announced the addition of this Hi-Fi model and another non-Hi-Fi deck (model SL-330, \$450) to its line of Super Beta VCRs soon after the news broke on its surprise decision to offer VHS models. These basic decks play back programs recorded in the Beta I speed (as well as II and III) for top picture quality. Real-time counters let you monitor tape position in hours, minutes and seconds for easy reference.

*Sony, Sony Dr.*

Park Ridge, NJ 07656

(201) 930-1000

### **NEC**

#### **Camcorder**

**Model CV-40U \$1,859**

NEC's second VHS-C camcorder (the simpler V-30U costs \$1,499) weighs 2 1/2 pounds with its battery and tape in place. You can play back your scenes within

the CV-40U—and watch them either through the machine's 2/3-inch electronic viewfinder or on a TV monitor. This camcorder includes a full complement of automatic features, including auto focus, continuous white balance and iris control.

NEC, 1255 Michael Dr.  
Wood Dale, IL 60191-1094  
(312) 860-9500

## DIGITAL VIDEO

### Interactive Disc Adapter UIA \$200

The kit includes system software for IBM PC, XT, AT personal computers (or clones) and an RS-232 laser disc player interface. PC and RS-232 laser player owners can combine their equipment into an interactive learning station.

Digital Video  
4405 Vineland Rd., Suite C4  
Orlando, FL 32811  
(305) 425-1999

## GOLDSTAR

### Combination TV/VCR Model KMV-9012 \$699

The Korean manufacturer will update its popular ViewMax TV/VHS VCR combo with this 19-inch color model in July. Time-shifters can program the ViewMax to record up to eight events over a 14-day period, or use the machine's "quick touch record" system. This system includes a 24-hour standby feature. Goldstar built the KMV-9012 with a 110-channel, cable-compatible tuner and HQ picture improvement circuitry. All TV and VCR functions operate from the deck's unified remote.

GoldStar  
1050 Wall St. W.  
Lyndhurst, NJ 07071  
(201) 460-8870

## ORA

### HQ Enhancer Model HQ1000 \$70

This component adds the high-quality enhancement to any machine with line video inputs, including VCRs, LV players or satellite receivers, according to Ora. ORA, 20120 Plummer St. P.O. Box 4029 Chatsworth, CA 91313 (818) 701-5848

## SAMSUNG

### Videocassette Recorder Model VR5620L \$400

Samsung broadens its VCR line with this VHS HQ VCR. The deck includes a built-in MTS/SAP decoder and conventional linear stereo. A frequency-synthesized, cable-compatible tuner receives 110 channels, and operates from a 23-key remote. In the special effects department, this VCR features "jet picture search" for very fast playback. A "HI-5" auto system provides automatic power on, play, rewind, eject and power off. The remote-programmable deck includes a four-event/365-day timer.

Samsung  
301 Mayhill St.  
Saddle Brook, NJ 07662  
(201) 587-9600

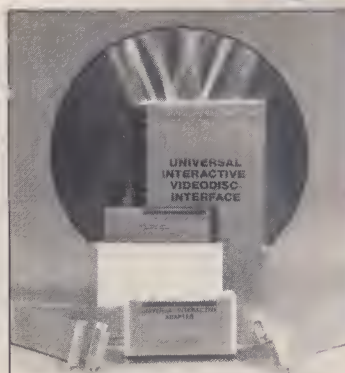
## AUDIO-TECHNICA

### Microphone Model ATR-55 \$90

As shown, this shotgun condenser microphone mounts easily on camcorders to provide the "audio equivalent of a zoom lens," according to the manufacturer. The mike has three positions—off, normal and "tele."

Audio-Technica  
1221 Commerce Dr.  
Stow, OH 44224  
(216) 686-2600

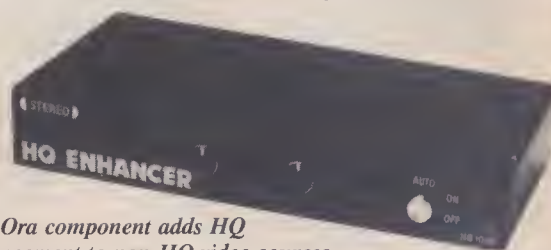
Compact, yet full-featured:  
the V-40U VHS-C  
from NEC.



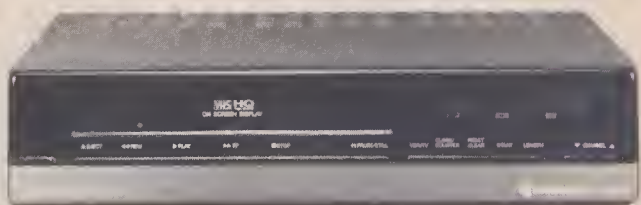
Digital Video's disc adapter.



The latest ViewMax  
from GoldStar.



This Ora component adds HQ  
enhancement to non-HQ video sources.



Samsung's low-price deck includes linear stereo and MTS.



Audio-Technica's microphone for "shotgun" weddings.

## ON THE DRAWING BOARDS

**LET'S GO TO THE VIDEO PAPER:** ICI, Britain's largest chemical company, just announced the development of a "digital paper" recording system. Using laser optical technology, the system records information on a thin (35mm) strip of dye-coated polyester film for playback. The record-only paper fits one terabyte (1,000 billion bytes) of data on a 1,640-foot length. Referred to in trade journals as the world's cheapest data storage medium, the technology could prove useful in solving the compression/decompression bottleneck thwarting further digital video development (see "Laser's New Frontier," Feb. '88 VR).

—Gregory P. Fagan

# Video Reviews

## LATEST MOVIES



Untouchables Connery, Costner: strong arms of the law—1930's Chicago style.

**THE UNTOUCHABLES** ★★★★★  
 Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, Robert De Niro, Andy Garcia, Charles Martin Smith, Billy Drago. Directed by Brian De Palma. 1987. Rated R. (Paramount cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, SS, 119 min., \$89.95; LV disc, \$34.95) □

By Andrew Sarris

*The Untouchables*, very loosely based on the popular Robert Stack TV series of a couple of decades ago, is a magnificent entertainment in both its movie and video versions. Yet it seems to have disturbed some of the cinematic intelligentsia (though not so much the general public) by suggesting that good occasionally triumphs over evil after a fair amount of blood, sweat and tears. Even director De Palma, whose thematic and stylistic trademark has been a string of gloomily misogynous slash-and-gash horror flicks, has virtually disowned *The Untouchables* as a conventional box-office compromise, and anti-establishment playwright David Mamet has not rushed to the defense of his own neat, tidy and suitably sentimental screenplay.

Still, the movie stands up on video partly because of its brilliant cast, partly because of its hauntingly Leone-like score by Ennio Morricone, partly because of its

expansively stylized set design of 1930 Chicago by William A. Elliott and partly because of its refreshingly unfashionable emotional commitment to law and order. In the '30s and '40s the censors would have forced the moviemakers to see to it that Costner's Eliot Ness prevailed over De Niro's Al Capone. Ever since *Bonnie and Clyde*, however, crime has been regarded as a justifiable metaphor for political and social discontent, and caper movies have turned out more often than not with the wrongdoers enjoying their loot on some island paradise.

What has been overlooked in this version of *The Untouchables* is its casually contemporary assumption that an entire police force, and, indeed, practically an entire society, can be corrupted by mob money. In 1930 it was the bootleggers; in 1988 it is the drug traffickers. *The Untouchables* does not go very deep into the problem. After all, it is told in the chivalric fable, with the four musketeers of the Treasury Department—Costner, Connery, Garcia and Smith—arrayed against De Niro's flamboyant Capone and his charismatic hitman, Frank Nitti (Drago). Ness never actually gets his hands on the spidery Capone, whose web of greed and violence enmeshes all of Chicago, but there is a satisfying revenge climax that brought roars from the

street people in the movie audiences, and groans from the professional pessimists about society in general.

For his part, De Palma supplies some of his patented homages to such montage-and-camera-movement stylists of the past as Eisenstein and Hitchcock, particularly in one almost tediously set-up gunfight with a baby carriage bumping down De Palma's version of the Odessa Steps. Costner is a revelation as the doggedly heroic Ness, and he is ably supported by Connery in one of his most affecting roles and De Niro in one of his showiest displays of his virtuosity. Here is a thoroughly adult attraction for the whole family and a beacon of virtue in a thoroughly depraved marketplace.



Keaton's Baby: a Boom, not a whimper.

**BABY BOOM** ★★★★★  
 Diane Keaton, Sam Shepard, Harold Ramis. Directed by Charles Shyer. 1987. Rated PG. (CBS/Fox cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 110 min., \$89.98) □

By Leonard Maltin

As the father of a 20-month-old, I guess you could call me a sucker for this movie. Be that as it may, I really enjoyed *Baby Boom*—not just for the comic points of reference, but for the sensational performance by its star.

Keaton plays a caricature of the '80s superwoman, a career-driven yuppie who



**Diabolical ties:** *Three small-town ladies (Cher, Sarandon and Pfeiffer) conjure up one mysterious ol' devil (Nicholson).*

a squeaky clean do-gooder, as he is here.

The only positive element in the production is the very elaborate rock score featuring, among other groups, the Bangles, on a soundtrack that has achieved a life of its own as a bestselling album.

## THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK ★★☆☆

**Jack Nicholson, Cher, Susan Sarandon, Michelle Pfeiffer.** Directed by George Miller. 1987. Rated R. (Warner cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, SS, 118 min., \$89.95; LV disc, \$39.98) □

By Jeffrey Lyons

The message here might just be this: Don't wish too hard for something you desperately want; you may wind up with it. That's exactly what happens to three lonely, sex-starved New England women in *The Witches of Eastwick*.

Tired of fending off the vulgar advances of the sleazeball high-school principal, they conjure up their ideal lover over martinis one rainy night. Enter Nicholson, much to their ultimate regret. The movie soon becomes a hilarious, superbly performed black comedy with supernatural overtones.

Adapted by Michael Christofer from John Updike's book, this is a witty, saucy, sometimes risqué, very adult movie about hedonistic excess, in which the three women undergo sudden, shocking changes. On video, the performances come across as convincing and as remarkable as they were on the big screen.

Sarandon plays a demure, recently divorced, high-school music teacher. Pfeiffer's husband has abandoned her and their six children, and Cher has just been widowed. Thus, all three are obviously no match for demon lover Nicholson. Indeed, from the moment Cher sees Nicholson sprawled on a bed in his mansion and expresses her revulsion toward him, you just *know* he'll bed her before the scene ends.

One by one, these women succumb to his rakish charms. Even though the movie's special effects get a bit out of hand toward the conclusion, this is a wild, no-holds-barred comedy of the first order.

One of the joys of watching this movie again is Sarandon's performance. Her transformation from a shy, insecure schoolmarm into a sexy, sophisticated lover is astonishing. She and the other women interact wonderfully with Nicholson, who gives one of the broadest, funniest performances of his career. The sardonic humor, set in the gorgeous hamlets of New England in the autumn, is sharp, biting and deliciously sinful.

Director Miller has carefully maintained the devilish mood of the movie throughout, and John Williams' score is the perfect topping for this delectable witches' brew of fun.

shares her apartment and her bed with a similarly single-minded male (played by Ramis). Theirs is the perfect superficial relationship, until Keaton "inherits" a baby from a distant relative. The infant intruder breaks up their home life, and temporarily distracts Keaton from her career goals, so much so that she decides to give the baby up for adoption until. . .

Well, you can guess much of the rest; fans of suspense or connoisseurs of twist endings need not watch this movie. Some people I know found it much too obvious all the way through. But in an era of overblown and often tasteless comedies, I thought *Baby Boom* was a lot of fun. Not innovative or challenging, but fun, with a good-natured, benign attitude that's frankly refreshing (and typical of its writers, Shyer and Nancy Meyers, who gave us the genial *Irreconcilable Differences* a few years ago).

Best of all, *Baby Boom* provides a custom-tailored vehicle for the talents of Keaton, who proves herself again to be one of our most gifted comedienesses. Her mounting hysteria here is a joy to behold. Meanwhile, Shepard strikes just the right note as the country veterinarian who wins her heart after she leaves Manhattan to live in Vermont. And the baby (in real life, twins) is adorable.

I'll admit that *Baby Boom* loses some momentum around the midway point, but with the help of Keaton and the overall feeling of good cheer that permeates the movie, it makes up for that lull and provides a full quota of laughs. Especially if you've just experienced a baby boom of your own.

## LESS THAN ZERO ★

**Andrew McCarthy, Jami Gertz, James Spader, Robert Downey Jr.** Directed by Marek Kaniévski. 1987. Rated R. (CBS/Fox cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 98 min., \$89.98) □

By Molly Haskell

This youth-oriented project has been adapted very unfaithfully from Bret Easton Ellis' bestselling campus cult novel, which

reads like little more than a series of hallucinatory episodes on the seamier side of the Beverly Hills crowd. In the book, the protagonist is involved in both drugs and bisexuality and is not particularly shocked by anything he sees, up to and including a brutal snuff movie. The emphasis is entirely on the failed love story of the protagonist and a drifting girlfriend.

The movie's hero (McCarthy) is completely outside both the drug and bisexual scene, a straight-arrow type who has come back to wicked L.A. from the comparatively innocent Ivy League to save his best friend (Downey Jr.). The friend in the book is a very incidental character; in the movie, Downey Jr. steals the show in a portrait of spiraling wretchedness as he descends ever downward to destruction.

The kids in the movie audience didn't buy this cleaned-up version, though there were reports that some cheered when the girl (Gertz) flushes some cocaine down the sink. The moviemakers apparently decided that in the age of Reagan and AIDS, drugs were out and bisexuality was a no-no, but the story makes no sense if the hero is

*Zero's Downey: scene-stealing wretch.*





**Fat City's Bridges and Keach: battling a world in which everyone's a loser.**

## FAT CITY ★★★★★

Stacy Keach, Jeff Bridges, Susan Tyrrell, Candy Clark. Directed by John Huston. 1972. Rated PG. (RCA/Columbia cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 93 min., \$69.95)

By Jim Farber

John Huston's *Fat City* shows us a world of fighters where everyone loses. In this deservedly celebrated movie (regarded by some as Huston's most fully realized work since the '50s classic *The African Queen*), Huston offers an excruciatingly detailed look at people whose lives have slipped away from them—people who have lost all control.

Keach plays Billy Tully, an ex-boxer who can't keep a job and who, at 30, feels his options narrowing to none. Bridges plays Ernie, a doofy, innocent kid who stumbles into boxing as clumsily as he does marriage and fatherhood. To mirror the aimless characters, Huston gives the movie a loose, rambling quality, as if he's making a documentary. He lets scenes run on to capture the serendipity of real time. Still, however raw and open-ended the scenes may be, they often include dense, pointed dialogue, filled with a natural, grim wit.

The screenplay is by the author of the original novel, Leonard Gardner. Though Gardner's script places boxers at the movie's center ring, their associates are just as fascinatingly hopeless. Cult actress Tyrrell plays Keach's lush of a lover with a loquaciousness so pronounced, you think she could collapse off the screen at any minute. Still, she never becomes cartoonish. Amid her broad, flailing comedy are communicated the subtleties of committed bitterness. (No wonder the performance earned her an Academy Award nomination.) Also providing sad humor is Nicholas Colasanto. He plays the boxers' trainer as a kind of skid-row Don King, with a talent for overstatement and self-deception.

Huston allows his actors to delineate their characters so precisely by standing back and giving them lots of room. It's a laconic, thoughtful approach. Even the fight scenes avoid easy drama. As a kind of opposite precursor to the *Rocky* movies, *Fat City*'s fights have a cruel malaise about them. Huston's camera keeps a remote, almost intellectual distance, avoiding *Rocky*-style amplification, and letting the punches land with a wan thud. It's the perfect accompaniment for all of *Fat City*'s characters—people for whom the battle has been decided before they even put on the gloves.

## MADE IN HEAVEN ★★

Timothy Hutton, Kelly McGillis, Debra Winger, Ellen Barkin. Directed by Alan Rudolph. 1987. Rated PG. (Lorimar cassette, B&W and color, Hi-Fi mono, 103 min., \$79.95) □

By Michael J. Weldon

In between writing and directing the fascinating, offbeat *Trouble in Mind* and the upcoming *The Moderns*, Alan Rudolph made this romantic fantasy. It's a charming if somewhat confused and episodic reincarnation tale. But it has enough good acting, interesting guest stars and some cosmic twists to make it worth a look.

Hutton plays a returning WWII GI named Mike, who dies while saving the life of a

drowning stranger. In Heaven, Mike enjoys a telepathic relationship with his guide Annie (McGillis), a beautiful "new soul." When Annie has to leave to be born on Earth, Mike is allowed to be reborn and is granted 30 years to find his perfect love again. They only remember Heaven and each other in dreams.

The early '40s scenes are in black-and-white and the later decades in color. Overall, *Made in Heaven* looks good on tape and, despite its unevenness, it makes you care whether the young lovers will meet again in time.

I got very impatient, however, with the first part of the movie, which mostly establishes the rules of reincarnation and heavenly teleportation. Things pick up back



**Heavenly ties: McGillis, Hutton.**

on Earth, however. And soon *Made in Heaven* reveals that its soul is in '60s counterculture, making this the best déjà vu hippie movie in years.

Eventually, everything leads to California where the power of music brings people together. Three of the Buffalo Springfield's best songs are heard on the soundtrack, Neil Young himself makes an appearance, and when Mike is reborn as a poor musician, he even looks like Young.

Emmett, a cigarette-smoking character who runs things in Heaven, is played by Hutton's real-life wife, Winger. She's pretty convincing in drag, even though she resembles and sounds like a young Mickey Rooney with a twitch. Barkin's unbilled appearance is a high point, and it's fun seeing bits of Tom Petty, the Cars' Ric Ocasek, Mare Winningham and Rudolph regular John Considine. Maureen Stapleton plays Mike's late aunt, an artist very content in Heaven.

## ABOUT THESE REVIEWS

To parallel the viewing environment of most home viewers, VR critics normally review programs in their homes. Unless otherwise indicated: all tapes are SP or Beta II; all LV discs are EP. All programs are in color unless marked B&W. □ indicates closed captions for the hearing-impaired; SS indicates surround sound.

- ★★★★ OUTSTANDING
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★ AVERAGE
- ★ BELOW AVERAGE



Johnson as the thinking woman's hunk in remake of Faulkner's *Long Hot Summer*—with Robards and sultry Cybill.

## THE LONG HOT SUMMER ★★

Don Johnson, Jason Robards, Cybill Shepherd, Judith Ivey. Directed by Stuart Cooper. (CBS/Fox cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 172 min., \$79.98) □

By Molly Haskell

You can take Don Johnson out of Miami, but can you take Miami out of Don Johnson? The answer is a resounding yes. As Ben Quick, the mysterious stranger who insinuates himself into a family of sex-and-money-mad Southerners, he's the thinking woman's hunk, and in this made-for-TV remake of the 1958 movie, he gives the original Ben, Paul Newman, a run for his Confederate dollars. That bit of hush-puppy hokum (itself adapted from Faulkner's *The Hamlet*) was the one in which Newman's blue eyes were proclaimed to the world by a smitten Joanne Woodward, while Lee Remick taunted Tony Franciosa.

In the new version, Shepherd flaps around in the sultry Remick part, while Ivey plays the virgin schoolmarm role and you can't blame her for having it on for Johnson. His eyes may not be transparent blue (according to Ivey, they're green, and who knows on a small screen anyway?), but what we see of the rest of him through discreetly torn T-shirts (presumably the maximum allowable for family TV viewing) almost makes up for the dopiness of a story that never had much but sexual repression going for it.

The characters, with their Big Daddy obsessions and their constant bragging about what rogues and scalawags they are, are the sort of stereotypes that nobody takes seriously anymore (if they ever did) and that are more likely to turn up as self-parodies on *Murder, She Wrote* than in straight

drama. Unfortunately, with the socially expanded and racially conscious teleplay by Rita Mae Brown and its earnest performances, the production is infected with a misplaced air of responsibility. Robards has some swagger, but I miss Orson Welles hamming it up with Newman, for, after all, what are steamy Southern sagas without bluster and raunch?

Johnson is good, though, and his relatively late-blooming career as an actor feeds the mythology here. He enters with an aura of mystery and the sense of a past, something most American stars don't develop until they're too old for it to do them any good.

## SUMMER NIGHT ★

Mariangela Melato, Michele Pacido, Massimo Wertmuller. Directed by Lina Wertmuller. 1987. Rated R. In Italian with English subtitles. (IVE cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 94 min., \$79.95)

By Robert DiMatteo

Remember when Italian director Wertmuller was thought to be the great feminist hope of the cinema? Her career's decline isn't slowed by this bald-faced rip-off of her own popular *Swept Away* (1975).

Once again, the theme is the age-old battle of the sexes, augmented here by such contemporary issues as terrorism and ecology. *Swept Away* star Melato—she of the bronzed skin, cotton-candy blond hair and fiery temperament—plays a tycoon and ecological crusader who abducts a notorious professional kidnapper, demanding \$100 million in ransom from his terrorist cohorts.

Like *Swept Away*, this luscious-looking, deeply hypocritical movie soon jettisons any meaningful socio-political interests. It

strips down to Wertmuller's favorite preoccupation: soft-core-style encounters between a "rich bitch" and an anti-bourgeois male—the latter made so extremely attractive that the woman appears to deserve (and even desire) the sexual humiliation he offers. This one isn't for a summer night—or any night, for that matter.



Reed: the slob as sex god?

## CASTAWAY ★

Oliver Reed, Amanda Donahoe. Directed by Nicolas Roeg. 1987. Rated R. (Warner cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 95 min., \$79.95) □

By Glenn Kenny

A dissatisfied modern man decides to chuck it all and live on a desert island for a year. Not wanting to take the Robinson Crusoe bit too far, he advertises for a female companion in the classifieds. The woman he takes with him turns out to be more than his match.

*Castaway* is a true story, based on the book of the same name by the woman in question, Lucy Irvine. In the book, the man looks at the island sojourn as a romantic adventure, leaving the spirited but untutored Irvine to tend to the rudiments of raw survival as best she can.

But the movie sells Irvine short. Reed plays the man in his familiar slob-as-sex-god mold and, although Donahoe acts well as the increasingly infuriated Irvine, director Roeg has a tendency to take Reed's point of view, making the female character a nit-picking harpy too much of the time. Character development and relevant dialogue are jettisoned in favor of either pretty or bizarre visuals, a Roeg trademark.

*Castaway* had the raw material to work on a number of levels, but it ends up adding nothing new to the battle of the sexes.

**PAUL ROBESON ★★ ★**  
*James Earl Jones. Directed by Lloyd Richards. 1974. (Today Home Entertainment cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 118 min., \$79.95)*

By Andrew Sarris

This stirring video production records a theatrical concert performance in which Jones simulates a Carnegie Hall concert by the late Paul Robeson, who is represented on the stage by a heroic bust. The small multiracial audience composed of friends and admirers of both the performer and his ill-starred subject is quiet and attentive, so that the overall mood is one more of dedica-



Jones as Robeson: rogue or martyr?

tion than exultation. Jones is ably assisted by Burt Wallace at the piano and occasionally in vocal passages as well.

Jones is graced with Robeson's manly physique and basso profundo authority, but he wisely makes little effort to emulate Robeson's singing beyond a few bars of "Ol' Man River," "Jacob's Ladder" and some other Robeson standards. Although far less controversial politically than Robeson was, Jones occupies much of the same theatrical eminence that made Robeson the trailblazing black Othello of his generation.

Phillip Hayes Dean's script takes Robeson from his pre-WWI All-American football hero days at Rutgers to his post-WWII "un-American" days before witch-hunting congressional committees. But the portrayal is never clogged with political rhetoric, as intimations of a roguish bravado verging on Don Juanism peep through the pain-wracked, seemingly endless racism.

Lloyd Richards, who directed Jones in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fences* on Broadway, guides Jones through a modulated reading of a turbulent memoir. For the uninitiated, there is a great deal of personal and historical information to be gleaned here. For the converted this is, of course, a mandatory purchase for the library of black liberation and human rights.

The easy rapport between Jones and

Wallace in evoking the fun-seeking frolics of popular music through the decades keeps the proceedings light and entertaining even when the poignancy of Robeson's plight is becoming almost unbearable. One may have aesthetic reservations about the seemingly exaggerated formality of Jones' delivery—as one did of Robeson's before him—but there is in the style the perhaps inescapable heritage of the black preacher leading his enslaved flock across the River Jordan to the promised lands of freedom, justice and the most casually assumed self-respect.

Ultimately, one would have to have a heart of stone and a brain full of mush not to respond emotionally to the rendering of Robeson agonistes by James Earl Jones. (Today Home Entertainment is at 9200 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069.)

### KING LEAR ★★

*Paul Scofield, Irene Worth, Cyril Cusack. Directed by Peter Brook. 1970. Rated PG. (Warner cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 137 min., \$19.98)*

By Bert Wechsler

This is Peter Brook's famous "unseen" movie version of Shakespeare's tragedy, made in 1970 but not widely distributed. The director cut and shaped the play to his own vision and so at no time should this be compared with the version starring Laurence Olivier that's played on TV.

Brook shot his *King Lear* in black and white, making almost continuous use of shadows, snow, fire, inhospitable landscapes and highlighted foreheads. There are many rushing crowds, hurrying horses and blowing winds. One problem is that it is often difficult to know (especially on the home screen) exactly who is talking and what is going on. Silent-movie-style, Brook sometimes supplies title cards, spelling out what is to come. This helps.

Most actors are of little concern to Brook, being just mediums for his directorial manipulation. Only perhaps when the director was out to lunch does the camera stand still and allow Scofield to act Lear. Then we have the majesty of the word, of the voice, of the actor. At these points we also have the glimmer of a potentially great movie. But, oh, that's so seldom. Worth plays Goneril as an even more evil Lady Macbeth. Don't cross her path.

There is power in this version, much blood and raw violence and an energy that is sweeping. It is not an easy movie to watch, but I shall watch it again—only for Scofield's performance.

Note: Gammel Skagen on the tip of Denmark's Jutland Peninsula, where Brook filmed Lear's horrendous winter, is a place I know well. It's a delightful spot in summer. Would that Lear had camped *then*.

### POOR LITTLE RICH GIRL ★★ ★★

*Shirley Temple, Alice Faye, Jack Haley. Directed by Irving Cummings. 1936. (Playhouse cassette, B&W, 72 min., \$19.98)*

### STOWAWAY ★★ ★

*Temple, Faye, Robert Young, Helen Westley. Directed by William Seiter. 1936. (Playhouse cassette, B&W, 86 min., \$19.98)*

### LITTLE MISS BROADWAY ★★

*Temple, George Murphy, Jimmy Durante, Edna May Oliver. Directed by Cummings. 1938. (Playhouse cassette, B&W, 70 min., \$19.98)*

### JUST AROUND THE CORNER ★★

*Temple, Joan Davis, Charles Farrell, Bill Robinson. Directed by Cummings. 1938. (Playhouse cassette, B&W, 70 min., \$19.98)*

By Ed Hulse

Shirley Temple's screen personality is so patently artificial, so unlike that of any real-life child, that contemporary adult viewers—even the most nostalgia-minded—often find it difficult to watch her old movies without choking on their popcorn. And yet, Temple was much more than a movie moppet to '30s theatergoers. She was a phenomenon, a diminutive embodiment of boundless energy and optimism, shining like a beacon to millions of American families in the gloom of the Depression's darkest days.

Temple's youthful exuberance and genuine talent still come across most convincingly in the topical musical comedies she made. Sure, her "bygone days" adventures (such as *The Littlest Rebel*, *The Little Colonel* or *The Little Princess*) are fun, but for many of us there's nothing quite like Temple in a '30s setting, accompanied by generous helpings of songs and dances. It's these musicals that transcend the kid-vid category of most of her other movies.

I've always felt that *Poor Little Rich Girl* represents the high watermark of Temple's career. To me, she was perfectly cast (and directed) as the little runaway heiress being sheltered by a down-on-their-luck husband-and-wife vaudeville team (Faye and Haley). They incorporate her into their act and win a spot on a big radio show—but not without unexpected complications. Naturally, everything works out by the fade-out. The delightful score, by Fox's top mid-'30s tunesmiths Harry Revel and Mack Gordon, includes the bizarre "You've Gotta Eat Your Spinach, Baby" and a big military-style tap-dance finale.

Temple and Faye were reteamed in *Stowaway*, about an orphaned American girl stranded in China during the Japanese invasion. Temple attaches herself to roving playboy Young and stows away on board a ship bound for Hong Kong. She sparks a romance between Young and Faye, who's on her way to marry a stuffed shirt mama's boy (nicely played by Allan Lane, a notorious stuffed shirt off-screen). Gordon and Revel once again provide the songs, which include "Goodnight, My Love" (a nominee for 1936's Best Song Oscar), and "You've Gotta S-M-I-L-E to Be H-A-P-P-Y," which Temple performs during amateur night in a Shanghai vaudeville house (so help me!). *Stowaway* allots generous footage to the Faye-Young romance, and (like *Poor Little Rich Girl*) it holds up as a good '30s musical for grownups as well as kids.

I can't say as much for *Little Miss Broadway*, a mediocre effort that demonstrates how thin the Temple formula had worn by 1938. Not that *Broadway* doesn't have its moments. Two musical numbers in which Temple shares the spotlight with Jimmy Durante and George Murphy, "We Should Be Together" and "Swing Me an Old-Fashioned Song," are quite good. The plot, which finds Temple as an orphan living among old vaudevillians in a soon-to-be-shuttered boarding house, depends too much upon stock situations and clichéd characters to be anything other than contrived and mechanical.

*Just Around the Corner* finds the Temple formula bursting at the seams. It was a boxoffice loser and precipitated Shirley's fall from grace with her Fox studio bosses. As the relentlessly cheerful daughter of a

widower (Farrell), she divides her energies between trying to find dad a hot date and organizing a neighborhood show a la Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. The songs are second-rate, and even "I Love to Walk in the Rain," Temple's big number with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, falls flat. The material isn't unpleasant to watch, it's just mundane. The spark was gone. Fox knew it, too: After two more pictures, Temple's contract expired and was not renewed—thus ending one of Hollywood's longest winning streaks.

### THE LITTLE COLONEL ★★ ★

*Shirley Temple, Bill Robinson, Lionel Barrymore. Directed by David Butler.*

1935. (Playhouse cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 81 min., \$19.98)

### THE LITTLEST REBEL ★★ ★

*Temple, John Boles, Jack Holt.*

*Directed by David Butler.*

1935. (Playhouse cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 70 min., \$19.98)

### DIMPLES ★★ ★

*Temple, Frank Morgan, Stepin Fetchit.*

*Directed by William Seiter. 1936.*

(Playhouse cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 78 min., \$19.98)

By Elizabeth Crow

"She is *really* cute!" was 11-year-old Sam's capsule review two minutes after he had wandered into the room where Shirley Temple's *Dimples* was playing on the VCR. He settled down to watch, and when his best friend came by a few minutes later, Sam advised him, "Wait until you see her close up." The boys were hooked.

And they were right, of course: Shirley Temple was probably the most adorable child star who ever lived. She looked like a pudgy two-year-old, but she could dance and sing and act like no child actress before her. Her crooning of "Believe Me If All These Endearing Young Charms" in *The Littlest Rebel* would melt a heart of stone. But I wasn't sure that it would melt the flintier heart of eight-year-old Rachel Crow, who is known to be a harsh critic of other children's performances.

Rachel's eyes may not go awash with sentimental tears every five minutes during '30s movies (unlike her mother's), but on one recent weekend, she eagerly sat through three early Temple classics in a row: the Civil War-era hits, *The Little Colonel*, *The Littlest Rebel* and *Dimples*. She would have happily stayed up for more, but it was long past her bedtime.

Like most children in the United States, Rachel wouldn't mind seeing herself billed as America's sweetheart, and I suspected that seeing a small child as talented and lovable as Temple singing and

### EDITOR'S NOTE

To review the cream of Playhouse's release of 10 Shirley Temple classics, VR asked Ed Hulse to consider some as nostalgia for all age groups and Parents magazine editor Elizabeth Crow to review some others as kid vid for today.

dancing and acting up a storm might be more galling than entertaining to her. I was wrong. Beyond commenting that Temple "seemed a bit smug," Rachel was awed by her performances (especially the dancing), her costumes and her extraordinarily curly hair. (Unlike my mother, whose childhood was blighted by my grandmother's efforts to make her straight hair bob obediently in Temple-inspired ringlets, Rachel felt no threat to her looks or comfort.)

Remarkably, for a child raised on color movies, videos and television, Rachel made the transition to black and white without comment—a credit to the action and drama in these three movies. The childish-innocence-triumphs-over-adult-evil themes in all three seemed fresh and extremely sensible to her. There is, however, appalling racial stereotyping in these movies that even she noticed. The most offensive is Stepin Fetchit's portrayal of a dimwitted slave in *The Littlest Rebel*. "What's wrong with him?" Rachel inquired—but the fact that these caricatures would be insulting to blacks didn't enter her head. To an adult, though, the Fetchit vignettes are really troubling, and the bad taste they leave in your mouth is made worse by scenes in both *The Little Colonel* and *The Littlest Rebel* in which the tiny, bossy Temple leads much older black children (and the adult Fetchit) in mock military exercises, as if authority over blacks were her birthright. On the bright side, the head houseman role that Bill "Bojangles" Robinson plays in both Civil War movies is relatively progressive: He's portrayed as articulate, intelligent and ingenious—and his famous staircase dance with Temple in *The Littlest Rebel* left Rachel dazzled.

*Dimples* is a charming 19th-century melodrama about a motherless waif raised by her con-man grandfather (played by Frank Morgan, whom Rachel recognized as the Wizard of Oz). It was a hit with all the children in our household, but parents should be forewarned that the movie features more scratching-and-shuffling performances by blacks and a nasty anti-Semitic remark.

All in all, though, Temple's performances have aged beautifully. These movies' plots are still appealing and absorbing. Unfortunately, they are also products of a less egalitarian era, and I was glad I was in the room to help discuss some of their crudest stereotypes.

Shirley Temple and Bill Robinson tap away their troubles in *The Little Colonel*.



## THE LOST BOYS ★★

Jason Patrick, Corey Haim, Jami Gertz, Kiefer Sutherland, Dianne Wiest. Directed by Joel Schumacher. 1987. Rated R. (Warner cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 98 min., \$89.95; Warner LV disc, \$34.98) □

By Michael J. Weldon

The best part of this teen vampire movie is watching the Frog Brothers (Corey Feldman and Jamison Newlander), a pair of funny, comic-book reading, Rambo-style Van Helsings. Their mission is to protect the new family in town from a gang of bikers/vampires who sleep hanging upside down from the ceiling.

Oscar-winner Wiest (*Hannah and Her Sisters*) plays the worried, confused, divorced mom, who has moved her family in with her eccentric taxidermist father (Barnard Hughes). When older son (Patrick) is seduced by a female vampire (Gertz), her other son (Haim) joins the anti-bloodsucker campaign, attacking with squirt guns filled with holy water. So far so good.

But *The Lost Boys* (by the director of *Sr. Elmo's Fire*) has problems with its super-



natural beings. The vampire gang looks like a style-conscious heavy metal band, and too much screen time is spent on ineffective aerial shots to give a flying vampire point of view. The idea of having the vampires float is lifted straight from *Salem's Lot* and parts also owe a major debt to *Rebel Without a Cause*. It helps, too, if you remember *The Munsters*, *The Brady Bunch* and even *The Flying Nun*. A poster of Jim Morrison is prominent in the vampires' lair, a weak, new version of "People Are Strange" is heard on the soundtrack, and star/victim Patrick often resembles the Doors' lead singer.

Pretty tame by today's horror-movie standards (no nudity, one pot joke, blood but no gore), *The Lost Boys* is sometimes

fun to watch but it is not very scary. And fans of Wiest, Hughes and Edward Herrmann may not relish seeing them reduced to a teen-oriented movie featuring a blood-filled, exploding toilet!

## SLAM DANCE ★

Tom Hulce, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Virginia Madsen, Harry Dean Stanton. Directed by Wayne Wang. 1987. (Key cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 99 min., \$79.98) □

By Ed Hulce

Since so many of today's movie thrillers are derivative of old film noir favorites, I wasn't especially put off by the prosaic plot setup for *Slam Dance*: Irresponsible cartoonist Hulce, his marriage to Mastrantonio gone sour following an ill-advised dalliance with classy call-girl Madsen, is suspected of the hooker's murder. Pursued by police detective Stanton and hounded by nameless thugs who think he can implicate them, Hulce races against time to ferret out the real killer.

For my money, this movie's real killer is

rocker Adam Ant's credit that his performance is nearly equal to those of acting pros Hulce and Stanton under Wang's direction.

The leaden pace that Wang imposes on a poorly developed storyline negates whatever suspense might have been generated by livelier playing and snappier presentation. On a big theatrical screen, with audience electricity to help it along, this is a passable thriller. On video, however, it's too lethargic to maintain your interest. This *Dance* starts off on the wrong foot and never gets in step.



Lahti, Follows: no hayseeds.

Teen vampire Sutherland (with Gertz's head on his shoulder) and buddies prepare for a night of sex and blood and rock 'n' roll.

## STACKING ★★

Christine Lahti, Frederic Forrest, Megan Follows, Peter Coyote. Directed by Martin Rosen. 1987. Rated PG. (Charter cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 111 min., \$79.98)

By Neal Gabler

*Stacking*, which has been released on video right on the heels of its theatrical release, is the sort of smallish movie that seems to be made for video. Modest of aspiration, quiet, grim and unlikely to appeal to a wide audience, it was made on a shoestring with help from Robert Redford's Sundance Institute.

It tells the story of a family whose lives are as flat as the Montana landscape they inhabit. The father stacks bales of hay but is laid up by an accident. The mother (Lahti) fritters away her life waitressing in the local cafe, dreaming of escape. Their 14-year-old daughter, too young to realize what

director Wang. His baroque handling of the story muddles what should have been an entertaining little show. Odd camera angles, annoying insert shots (such as a worm's-eye view of a rotating ceiling fan framed against a skylight) and impressionistic lighting effects are interpolated with no apparent regard for narrative impact. *Slam Dance* looks like the pretentious product of an ambitious film school student trying to impress his instructors.

Worse yet, the movie is sabotaged by Wang's turgid direction of a good cast. His reliance on the pregnant pause during dialogue exchanges, apparently meant to imply contemplation, instead suggests that the actors are groping for lines—most of which are unnecessarily cryptic. It's to

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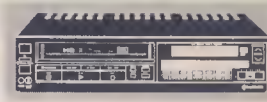


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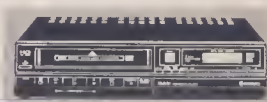
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awaits her, determines to carry on her father's operation with the help of an aimless neighbor (Forrest). They are all leaves in the wind of life.

*Stacking* is to be lauded as an effort to chronicle American quotidian reality. But lauding it is easier than watching it. In a movie where lives are intended to be as exciting as paint drying, the movie itself has the same effect. I assume it's veristic; it's just not dynamic.

As a slice of arid life, though, it may satisfy viewers who disdain the flamboyant fictions of Spielberg and Lucas, and video is certainly the best place for them to view it.

## A MAN IN LOVE ★★

*Peter Coyote, Greta Scacchi, Peter Reigert, Jamie Lee Curtis. Directed by Diane Kurys. 1987. Rated R. (Nelson cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 110 min., \$79.98)*

By Molly Haskell

An actor and an actress out of their depth on a movie set in Rome—that's the theme of Kurys' English-language love story. That's its problem, too.

Coyote may be one of the more intriguing actors around and he certainly generated a slithery, malignant excitement in *The Jagged Edge* and *Outrageous Fortune*. But he doesn't have the force of a leading man. This time he's supposed to be the magnetic center and serious actor-star of a movie being made about the Italian poet Cesare Pavese, yet the camera treats him like Mastroianni, which he isn't. Meanwhile, Scacchi, who has a nice deliciousness as the country girl he falls for, is no Loren.

The movie does offer tantalizing glimpses into Pavese, the poet and diarist who killed himself in 1950 at age 42. Claudia Cardinale is on hand as Scacchi's dying Italian mother to provide a genuine flavor and a rootedness lacking in the American showbiz scenes (and do we really say the F-word so often?).

The settings in and around Rome are beautiful, but there's a peculiarly ersatz quality to the whole—like a *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* episode posing as *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In her previous smaller-scale movies, Kurys showed a particular skill in recreating that cocoonlike state when two people withdraw from the world and create their own jokes and defenses. But in this bid for international recognition, her lovers are so much on display that even their intimacies have a hollow, histrionic quality.

Curtis, as the possessive wife, can't quite



Coyote, Scacchi: no Antony and Cleo.

take up the slack in a thankless part (though she plays a mean game of tennis). But Reigert has real juice as Coyote's manager, the son of a butcher, who's traveled a long way from Brooklyn to decadence and isn't complaining.

## THE CARS THAT ATE PARIS ★★

*John Meillon, Terry Camilleri. Directed by Peter Weir. 1974. Rated PG. (RCA/Columbia cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 91 min., \$69.95)*

By Jim Farber

Contrary to its title, *The Cars That Ate Paris* is not another autos-from-hell thriller (a la *The Car*, *Duel* or *Christine*). Instead it's just your average story of a remote town filled with maniacs (in Paris, Australia, not Paris, France) who cause all passing cars to have hideous accidents so they can sell the mangled remains as scrap metal. It's a living, of sorts.

As a tale of a wholly insane town, the picture shares something in common with Herschell Gordon Lewis' junk epic *2000 Maniacs*, though this movie takes itself significantly more seriously. In fact, it attempts to be roughly the cinematic equivalent of Shirley Jackson's classic town-with-a-secret story, *The Lottery*. As written and directed by Weir, the movie has moments approaching Jackson's level of mystery and horror. But mostly this primitive work shows little of the talent the director revealed with his later movies, such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Witness*.

Some of the movie's impressively deranged details are worth noting. For instance, if the contrived auto accidents don't

kill the drivers, they are either "adopted" or (far more frequently) turned into vegetables to be involved in strange experiments. The protagonist of the tale gets the adoption treatment after suffering a double horror: His brother dies in an accident in Paris and, several years earlier, he accidentally killed a man with his own car.

As the "hero," Camilleri gives an intriguingly imploded performance. Likewise, Meillon, as the town's mayor, effuses a grand menace worthy of James Mason. With their performances as anchor, the movie occasionally captures the horror of inescapable conspiracy, but too often events are confusing and unfocused. Likewise the constant auto and accident allusions wind up significantly less metaphorical than intended. Toward the end, the movie breaks down completely, winding up as twisted and junky as the cars themselves.

## THE SQUEEZE ★

*Michael Keaton, Rae Dawn Chong, John Davidson, Liane Langland. Directed by Roger Young. 1987. Rated PG-13. (HBO cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 102 min., \$89.95)*

By Jeffrey Lyons

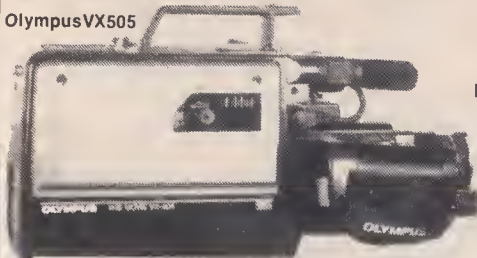
Michael Keaton is one of the most likable light comedians in movies today. That's why it's so frustrating to see the star of *Gung Ho* and *Mr. Mom* wasting his time and talents with *The Squeeze*. It's a routine crime comedy with few laughs and nothing terribly original about it.

Keaton plays a small-time con man/gambler who also creates huge sculptures which he painstakingly assembles in his loft. His ex-wife unexpectedly re-enters his life to ask him to pick up a suspicious package at her apartment and he idiotically agrees. It turns out that the package contains a stolen computer component designed to affect an upcoming lottery drawing. Keaton spends the rest of the picture fleeing a team of thugs as he vacillates between playing his role comedically and dramatically, seemingly caught in material he should have rejected.

There are a few pluses. Chong, always engaging, makes a refreshing if unlikely love interest, though her character is underwritten. And Meat Loaf, the cult rock star, is eerie and convincing in an offbeat way as one of the thugs chasing Keaton. Langland makes a memorable debut as Keaton's ex-wife, and Belgian-born Ronald Guttman is convincing as the mastermind of the lottery scam. These promising actors deserve better.

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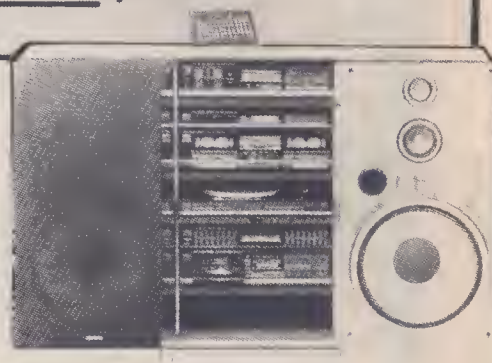


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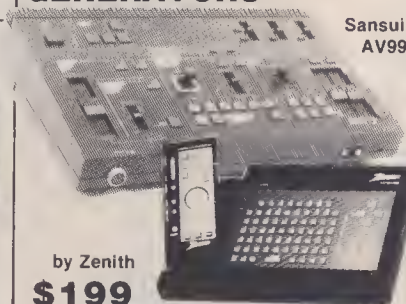
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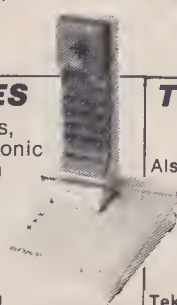
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## HOWLING III ★★

Barry Otto, Imogen Annesley, Leigh  
Biolos. Directed by Philippe Mora.  
1987. Rated PG-13. (Vista cassette,  
Hi-Fi mono, 94 min., \$79.95)

By Doug Brod

It's hard not to like this affable little mess of a movie because it's just so, well, different. *Howling III* is not especially a horror flick—at least not in the conventional sense. This in-name-only second Australian sequel to Joe Dante's *Howling* is more a wolf-out-of-the-woods affair—“*Lycanthrope*” *Dundee*, if you will.

The outsider is a beautiful, green-eyed, werewolf-kangaroo hybrid(!) from rural

Oz, who's got a hairy belly and a pouch for her offspring. When she runs away from her lecherous clan of telepathic wereroos, she finds herself in the big city (Sydney) and quickly lands a part in a horror flick. Three female clan members don nuns' habits and track her down. All heck breaks loose.

Writer-director Mora previously helmed 1985's unwatchable *Howling II* (a picture he has since disowned), but you wouldn't know it from viewing this one. Where *II* was a forced and unfunny “comedic” take, *Howling III* is actually gentle, with occasionally witty throwaways. (At one point, the college-age scion of the wereractress explains to an old friend of the family: “My mother gets enough attention nowadays

without revealing that she's a marsupial human.”)

But the movie is often too smart and ambitious for its own good. With its attempts at parodying other werewolf movies and its pseudomystical history of the marsupial humans—to mention just two of the tangential nods—*Howling III* is overloaded and scattershot. It also boasts some truly lame American accents approximated by Australian actors. And it's never scary. Yet *Howling III* has the grudging appeal of a persistent puppy that won't let go of your pant leg—and that's some kind of praise.

## SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME ★★

Tom Berenger, Mimi Rogers,  
Lorraine Bracco, Jerry Orbach, John  
Rubinstein. Directed by Ridley Scott  
1987. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia  
cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 106 min., \$89.95)

By Steve Simels

A very wise person once opined that too many of today's directors seem to have gone from film school straight to directing without ever passing through life. Take Ridley Scott. I mean, here's a guy with a great eye for art direction (*Blade Runner*), who really knows how to move his camera



Berenger, Orbach, Rubinstein, Rogers...

around (*Alien*), but can't tell a coherent story or convey feelings.

Scott's latest, *Someone to Watch Over Me*, is a thriller about a tough Queens detective who falls in love with a gorgeous society dame he's assigned to protect. As usual, in the execution, Scott has opted for glitz rather than substance. This isn't a movie about people; it's an ad for *Architectural Digest* inflated to a theatrical feature.

To be fair, there are some good performances. Berenger makes his wayward cop extremely sympathetic and Bracco is nothing short of sensational as his loving but not-to-be-messed-with wife. Mostly, though, this is yet another demonstration that techniques derived from TV commercials and music videos don't mesh with movie suspense or the concerns of the human heart.

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## MONDO TRASHO ★★

*Divine, Mary Vivian Pearce, David Lochary, Mink Stole. Directed by John Waters. 1969. Not rated. (Cinema Group cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 98 min., \$39.98)*

## MULTIPLE MANIACS ★★★

*Divine, Pearce, Lochary, Stole, Edith Massey. Directed by Waters. 1970. Not rated. (Cinema Group cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 91 min., \$39.98)*

## FEMALE TROUBLE ★★

*Divine, Pearce, Lochary, Stole, Massey. Directed by Waters. 1974. Not rated. (Cinema Group cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 91 min., \$39.98)*

## DESPERATE LIVING ★★

*Liz Renay, Pearce, Stole. Directed by Waters. 1977. Not rated. (Cinema Group cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 90 min., \$39.98)*

A Jean Harlow look-alike is attacked by a foot fetishist to the accompaniment of "Strangers in the Night." A woman engages in lesbian sex in a church (including rape by rosary beads) and is later devoured by a giant lobster(!). A butch blonde with a sex change mutilates him (her)self after being spurned by his (her)



*Who's watching whom—and why?*

girlfriend. A 300-pound female impersonator (the late Divine), playing a dual role as a truck driver and a floozie, rapes himself through the wonders of trick photography.

These are just some of the moments from the nearly decade's worth of features by Baltimore trash aesthete John Waters that have now achieved home video immortality. Believers in traditional family values may find them appalling. But, perhaps not surprisingly, though Waters' name is more or less synonymous with the cutting edge of cinematic offensiveness (this is the auteur behind *Pink Flamingos*, after all), none of these four movies is likely to gross out a generation raised on the *Friday the 13th* series.

Still, these movies remain, by and large, both funny and objectionable. Watching them in chronological order, as Waters

moves from one-take undergraduate primitivism to something resembling big-budget professionalism, I found the experience profoundly depressing. For all their Warholian campiness and sophomoric shock, Waters clearly meant his first features (at least on some level) as scathing critiques of the counterculture's utopian delusion. He sensed early on that the Brave New World nostrums of his contemporaries would soon come down to the same old sex, violence, banality, cynicism and schlock. In retrospect, *Mondo Trasho* and *Multiple Maniacs* look like despairingly prophetic evocations of the decade to come—which is to say that their creator, for all his wallowing in demented sleaze, was that

rarest of rare birds in American movies, a genuine moralist.

The later work (*Female Trouble* and *Desperate Living*) lacks that kind of outraged subtext, probably because, by the time they were made, not many believed much in anything anymore, let alone the Greening of America. So Waters retreated, with the help of his bizarre stock company, into *epater le bourgeois* shtick, in which the shock effects look like Hollywood and the bad taste seems more a marketing decision than the expression of somebody's genuinely warped sensibility.

Like I said, it's depressing. Picture and sound quality are, however, quite good on all four releases. (S.S.)

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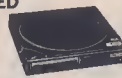
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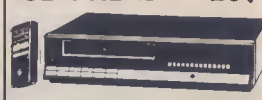
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## CLASSICS

### THE BIG TRAIL ★★☆☆

John Wayne, Marguerite Churchill, Tyrone Power Sr., Ian Keith. Directed by Raoul Walsh. 1930. (Key cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 120 min., \$19.98)

By William K. Everson

Though it's nearly 60 years old, *The Big Trail* is by far the most important and attractive of the package of seven John Wayne movies now being released in a low-price promotion by Key Video. One of the most overlooked, even maligned of Wayne's westerns, it fully deserves those over-worked words "classic" and "epic." In fact, it is everything that the silent *The Covered Wagon* should have been and wasn't.

*The Big Trail* was made under extreme difficulties, mainly because most of it was filmed on location in simultaneous 70mm widescreen and standard 35mm versions, plus French and German versions with different casts. The logistics of such an undertaking in those early days of sound movies—when there were just no precedents for making even a standard talkie superwestern of this type, let alone multiple versions—were incredible, resulting in all sorts of corner-cutting in production niceties. All this gave the film a naturalistic, rough-hewn

Early Wayne: 70mm buckaroo.



quality which turned audiences off at the time, but which adds immeasurably to its value today. It almost looks like a documentary of the great wagon-train treks. Cast and crew went through virtually the same hardships (Indian warfare excepted) as the original pioneers, and it shows. Oddly enough, Wayne himself, over the years, often derided his own performance (his first starring role after a few bit parts for John Ford). Actually, his ingenuous persona is exactly right for the picture, since he plays a young plainsman surrounded by more experienced men. His performance shows the beginnings of many of his later mannerisms, and, if he's let down at all, it's by the occasionally stilted (by today's standards) dialogue which no one could deliver convincingly.

The buffalo hunt, Indian attack, river fordings and, especially, the lowering of wagons over cliffs (a sequence so good that the footage was used again a decade later in *Brigham Young*) are all breathtakingly done. The cast is full of good performances, from Tyrone Power Sr.'s wonderfully bravura villain to Ward Bond in a bit role. There's also a surprisingly good musical score, rare for movies in 1930, when it was considered an artificial device.

For years *The Big Trail* was considered lost, but it resurfaced about 20 years ago in some prints deriving from a French negative with missing scenes and rather muddy sound. Both pictorially and sound-wise, this tape edition is virtually flawless, the tip-off being the cameraman credit to Arthur Edeson, who photographed the widescreen version (as opposed to Lucien Andriot, who did the standard version). This means that the pre-print material is from the recently rediscovered (and little used) 70mm Grandeur negative, and the results are stunning. While it offers breathtaking panoramic compositions, Walsh kept in mind the requirements of the standard version and so there is plenty of close-up work, thus avoiding the "distancing" that affected another early widescreen western, *Billy the Kid*, done almost entirely in long and medium shots. Occasionally in the tape transfer a character almost disappears off the side of the screen when he shouldn't.

Some minor soundtrack deterioration results in a few lines of dialogue being mildly garbled by missing words. Key could have left them alone or just rerecorded them from the standard prints, but chose instead to complete the lines via subtitles. That's the kind of care all too few video distributors take these days.

There are two minor errors on the cassette box, however. The movie is from

1930, not 1931 as stated. Also, the tape actually provides about 10 minutes more than promised—including two minutes of wonderful post-end-title music.

This release gets my highest recommendation, both for the movie itself and for the trouble taken in making such an excellent video version available.



Donlevy, Angelus: de-Capafied.

### THE GREAT MCGINTY ★★☆☆

Brian Donlevy, Muriel Angelus, Akim Tamiroff, William Demarest. Directed by Preston Sturges. 1940. (MCA cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 81 min., \$29.95)

By Neal Gabler

For a brief and marvelous span in the '40s, writer-director Preston Sturges was the envy of Hollywood as well as its antidote. Consciously working against the American grain, Sturges fashioned a string of smart, cynical and ultimately subversive comedies that seemed to undermine the sunnier, more homespun homilies of Hollywood's other hero, Frank Capra. Sturges' first movie as a director (he had been one of the priciest writers since the mid-'30s), *The Great McGinty* went before the cameras just a few months after the release of Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*—and it seems like an inversion of that popular hit. *Mr. Smith* is about the power of faith and innocence within our political process. *The Great McGinty* is about the danger of honesty.

McGinty (Donlevy) is an ornery hobo who comes to the attention of a political machine when he votes 37 times for the machine's candidate for mayor at two dollars per vote. Seeing that he is rougher and shrewder than most of the other petty grafters, the boss (Tamiroff) promotes him



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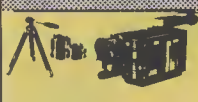


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**Vogues: "Is that a peacock under your turban, or are you just glad to see me?"**

to alderman, then mayor and finally boosts him for governor. So long as he's a crook, he's doing fine. It's when the machine arranges a marriage for him to get the women's vote and his wife encourages him to reform that he gets in trouble. In Sturges, the world is always skewed that way.

Though he was to make better movies (including *Christmas in July* and *The Lady Eve* the year after *McGinty*), Sturges' hallmarks are all over this picture: his smart dialogue (it won him an Oscar), his ability to turn clichés inside out, his eye for casting peripheral roles, his sour vision. *McGinty* is the sort of movie my generation would have gratefully discovered on the Late Show. Now, a new generation can enjoy its video release in this election year—both as a wry comedy and as an introduction to an important and highly idiosyncratic talent.

### VOGUES OF 1938 ★★

**Warner Baxter, Joan Bennett, Mischa Auer. Directed by Irving Cummings. 1937. (Axe cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 108 min., \$69.95)**

**By Roy Hemming**

When Walter Wanger's *Vogues* opened at New York's Radio City Music Hall in the summer of 1937—as one of the first multimillion-dollar Hollywood musicals in the three-strip Technicolor process—it was hailed as eye-boggling, opulent, glamorous and spectacularly colorful. Fifty years later, it still is all that. It is also surprisingly stylish, snappily paced and wonderfully silly. I wouldn't want to watch it right after *Blue Velvet* or *River's Edge*, but for good, clean, old-fashioned nostalgia, its charms hold up nicely indeed.

Once again, early Oscar-winner Baxter is cast as a problem-beset impresario (as he was in *42nd Street*). This time it's his Fifth Avenue couturier business that's in trouble. Along comes debutante Bennett (looking more beautiful than ever in Technicolor—this time as a strawberry blonde). She helps save the business but also, understandably, wrecks his shaky marriage—in between an almost continuous parade of '30s high fashions, most of which don't look as dated

as you might expect. Well, some anyway.

Since all this is scripted with typically sharp and often droll lines by Sam and Bella Spewack (of *Boy Meets Girl*, *My Favorite Wife* and *Kiss Me, Kate* fame), it never gets boring, even when the domestic drama becomes predictable toward the end. The colorful but routinely staged musical numbers include the Oscar-nominated "That Old Feeling," sung in a rare on-screen appearance by an unbilled Virginia Verrill (best known as the dubber of Jean Harlow and other Hollywood non-singers in their musicals).

New Yorkers will especially love the vintage color shots of the city in '37, with its double-decker buses, two-way traffic and clean streets. Old-timers will also have fun spotting Hedda Hopper and Dorothy McNulty (before she became *Blondie*'s Penny Singleton) in bit roles—as well as some of the top cover girls and advertising models of the late '30s among the movie's bevy of clotheshorses in both the foreground and the background.

### QUARTET ★★

**Dirk Bogarde, Honor Blackman, Francoise Rosay, Nora Swinburne, Cecil Parker, Mai Zetterling. Directed by Ralph Smart, Harold French, Arthur Crabtree, Ken Annakin. 1948. (Axe cassette, B&W, Hi-Fi mono, 120 min., \$69.95)**

**By Andrew Sarris**

When Somerset Maugham appeared on transatlantic screens in 1948 to introduce these movie versions of four of his short stories, he shattered a long-standing industry disdain for unrelated multipisode features. The success of the English-made *Quartet* (in contrast to some previous Hollywood multi-tale flops) led to two other Maugham sequels, *Trio* and *Encore*. On video, *Quartet* still stands up beautifully as a well-balanced entertainment.

The amusing curtain-raiser features those two erstwhile cricket enthusiasts of Hitchcock and other British pictures, Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne, enmeshed in an ironic fable, in which youth shows its elders

a thing or two. The two middle episodes are excellent but somewhat more somber, what with an aspiring young pianist (Bogarde) shooting himself because he's been told he has no talent, and a kite-flyer (George Cole) leaving his wife (Susan Shaw) to return to his scheming mother (Hermione Baddeley) because his wife has smashed his kite. The final episode is a seriocomic knockout, as a Blimpish colonel is embarrassed to discover that his wife has written a sensationally sexy book-length poem about an old affair. Parker and Swinburne are a delight as the provincial couple, and they are brilliantly supported by an array of fine British character actors—Wilfred Hyde-White, Ernest Thesiger, Felix Aylmer and Cyril Raymond among them.

Indeed, all four Maugham stories—titled, respectively, “The Facts of Life,” “The Alien Corn,” “The Kite” and “The Colonel’s Lady”—are blessed with a depth and richness of acting talent that was then the glory of the British Isles. Maugham himself, moreover, was a natural for the camera, and he shows the flair he long had for dismembering his critics.

Actually, the adaptations of his stories were somewhat more sentimental than the stories themselves, particularly in the matter of endings. Some literary types were aghast in 1948 at the “commercial” changes, but most videocassette viewers (particularly in these pathologically “feel

good” times) will probably approve the softening of Maugham’s misanthropically vinegary outlook on life, which once prompted Noel Coward to remark that Maugham had one big fault: He didn’t much like people. But any movie that can make you, in turn, smile and then brush away a tear, has a great deal going for it. *Quartet* has that.

## TORMENT ★★

*Mai Zetterling, Stig Jarrel, Alf Kjellin.*  
*Directed by Alf Sjöberg. 1944. (Nelson cassette, B&W, in Swedish with English subtitles or in a dubbed version, 90 min., \$29.95)*

By Stephen Harvey

This compelling melodrama has been presented over the years somewhat misleadingly as “Ingmar Bergman’s *Torment*.” While it was indeed his first filmed screenplay, the movie was directed by Alf Sjöberg, best known abroad for the 1951 film version of Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and Sweden’s most distinctive director in the sound era prior to Bergman’s international consecration in the mid-’50s. Although *Torment* anticipates some of Bergman’s later themes, it’s really a variation on American *film noir* of the ’40s, inflected with a Scandinavian blend of psychological bleakness and sexual candor.

The story is about a sensitive high-school senior (Kjellin) who is arbitrarily persecuted by his Latin master (Jarrel), a deceptively mild-mannered petty sadist. The stakes are raised when both become enraptured with a moody town trollop (Zetterling). Torment is indeed the word for the private hell endured by each member of this trio, eloquently conveyed by a superlative cast. Ardent Kjellin and the mercurial Zetterling (both of whom later enjoyed international careers as actors and directors) demonstrate why they were Sweden’s youthful movie idols of the ’40s. Jarrel, a distinguished character actor who later turned up in Bergman’s *The Devil’s Eye*, gives a creepy portrait of sexual repression curdled into professional tyranny.

Yet *Torment*’s most notable aspect is the chilling clarity of Sjöberg’s directorial eye—quite the equal of Fritz Lang’s achievements in the *film noir* genre during this period. The print quality of Nelson’s cassette release (from a 35mm print) is superlative, capturing all of Sjöberg’s smoky gradations of black and white. The subtitles, however, are marred by an unusual number of typographical errors.

*Torment* (which has had a limited cable-TV release as *Frenzy*), may not be the movie of choice for an escapist evening at home with a drink and popcorn, but it’s a rare, welcome and fascinating addition to the library of movie classics on tape.

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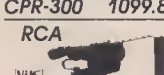
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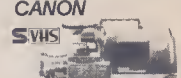
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# MUSIC

## IT ALL COMES 'ROUND AGAIN ★★★

*Fairport Convention, Sandy Denny, Richard Thompson. Directed by Paul Kovit. 1987. (Fairport Associates cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 110 min., \$34.95)*

By Gregory P. Fagan

*This Is Spinal Tap* all but deep-sixed the "rockumentary" format. Who could buy rockers offering earnest deconstruction of their *oeuvre* after Nigel (played by



*Fairporters Pegg, Mattacks, Nicol.*

Christopher Guest) described his amp's (it's got 11) omnipotence? Well, aside from MTV viewers?

This document of seminal English folk-rock band Fairport Convention's 20-year history employs all of rockumentary's stylistic clichés—but still succeeds as both history lesson and rock show. Credit goes mainly to the band members interviewed, all of whom avoid "a true visionary, a legend in..." hyperbole in their discussions. Fairport didn't hit the big time, and one suspects that they never so aimed.

The performance footage comes primarily from Fairport's fall '87 "reunion" concert in Cropredy, England. The history behind these annual reunions, as well as a graphic detailing of the band's frequent personnel changes, are offered on the tape and in its accompanying notes. This musical focus on Fairport's current lineup, though, dulls the overall effect of the tape.

While much of the program covers Fairport's knack for integrating traditional folk music with rock instrumentation, the tunes served up by the band's current lineup seem to pick up where Jean-Luc Ponty left off. (Add a star if you can say fusion without cringing.) It's easy enough to clean a room, exercise and so on while these numbers play through—and return to the set when the band gets back to its unique strengths.

Kudos to all the technicians involved with this project. Director Kovit pieced the footage together with care, and those responsible for the film-to-video transfer carried through his attention to detail. Even the rare archival clip of former lead singer Sandy Denny looks and sounds great.

## ZABAGABEE: THE BEST OF BARNES & BARNES ★★★

*Barnes & Barnes. Various directors. 1987. (Rhino cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 40 min., \$29.95)*

By Jim Farber

Barnes & Barnes are a joke—but an awfully good one. The West Coast duo achieved infamy several years back with the underground novelty single and video "Fish Heads." Now this long-form collects that clip plus six lesser known but equally demented ones, including the S&M farce "Love Tap" and the ever-cheery "When You Die." To tie the clips together, the duo has concocted pseudodocumentary-style footage, in the manner of the *Rutles* movie. Narrating these segments is a surprisingly legit array of witnesses, including Rosemary Clooney, Shirley Jones, Mark Hamill and Jose Ferrer, all paying tribute to what Ferrer calls "the supreme artistry of Art and Artie Barnes."

That "artistry" is even more jarring on video than on vinyl. After all, it's one thing to hear impish chipmunk voices yap about the joys of chowing down on fish heads on

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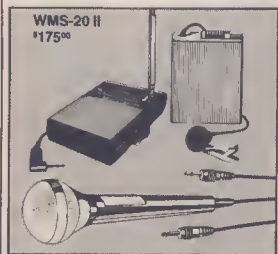
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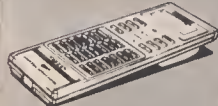
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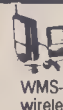


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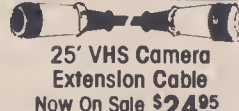
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the audio version. It's quite another to actually see the "heads" decked out in sweaters and party hats, or planted in the ground like corrupt daffodils. In fact, the imagery in most of the videos is impressively double-pronged and as startling as it is funny.

From the possessed-looking plastic babies to the oceans of eyes, the visuals manage to raise gross-out humor to the level of the Dadaesque. In that way, Barnes & Barnes' video work approaches the most disorienting clips by Devo or the Residents. Of course, this goofball duo lacks those bands' intellectual depth. But for sheer visual invention, Barnes & Barnes have earned their place in music video's sicko vanguard.

### THE CURE IN ORANGE ★★★

*The Cure. Directed by Tim Pope. 1987. (Elektra cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 113 min., \$24.98)*

By Doug Brod

Awash in clouds of stage smoke, his chalky white face smeared with crimson lipstick and gray eye grease, pouty Robert Smith looks as if he just stepped out of Dr. Caligari's cabinet. As singer, guitarist and principal songwriter for the British band the Cure, Smith is a compelling communicator of grim alienation and childlike whimsy—

and quite a commanding pop presence.

Shot among the photogenic stone ruins of France's Theatre Antiques d'Orange amphitheater, Smith and band churn through an almost two-hour concert of their odes to dreams and despair. Morose and lethargic—yet almost always neatly propped up by reinforced dance rhythms—the Cure's songs on record are atmospheric examples of a peculiar brand of shadowy rock only the Brits seem to do well.

The Cure's brilliant video compilation, *Staring at the Sea—The Images*, demonstrated that when yoked with the group's visual presentation (weeping willow 'dos and black threads) the music gains potency and vigor. In fact, during a triad of favorites on *The Cure in Orange* ("Close to Me," "Let's Go to Bed" and "Six Different Ways"), Smith becomes a cherubic voodoo/rag doll, jaunty and coquettish, adding wisps of life and exoticism to an often dirgelike repertoire.

Director Pope, who was responsible for most of the clips on *Staring at the Sea*, has a real handle on the band's dusky reverie. His constantly active (35mm) cameras trek across the stage, often creeping up behind Smith and peering over his shoulder, capturing the group in all its melancholy glory. You'd be hard-pressed finding a better shot or recorded concert movie—and this one's widescreen displays are admirably preserved in the letterbox format.

This tape may not win fans for the Cure (the band's collective detached persona may be a wee too affected for some), but for the already familiar, *The Cure in Orange* is more than just blue.

## COMEDY

### PENN & TELLER'S CRUEL TRICKS FOR DEAR FRIENDS ★★★

*Penn Jillette, Teller, Alan Hunter, Lydia Lunch. Directed by Art Wolff. 1988. (Lorimar cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 59 min., \$20)*

By Gregory P. Fagan

If you've ever left a little yellow Post-it with the inscription "CALL THE BOSS—VERY IMPORTANT" on a fellow employee's desk then this made-for-video presentation is for you. Aside from proving that Penn and Teller stand alone today at home video's creative edge, *CTs for DFs* wins them 10s across the board for creative embarrassment. Are these guys ever mean!

In *Cruel Tricks*, Penn and Teller provide (with hilarious detail) a series of video pranks or scams for you to play on unsuspecting friends at home. Each trick involves using the tape itself, which includes the pair's presentation of the sting, followed

by the actual sting segment you are to use when the time comes. At the close of each trick, the hosts remind the viewers that there may even be bucks aplenty to be scammed from unsuspecting *amigos*. Ooo, they're mean!

Given the tape's intended use, I'd rather not spoil any of the potential fun (or profits) by describing it further. If you know and enjoy Penn and Teller's work, 20 bucks seems a steal (and they're the ones who set the price, not \$19.95 but \$20). If you're mildly interested in these odd-looking fellows in gray suits, try it—I certainly laughed a lot. And, if you're just the type that Penn describes herein with nearly a hundred new and degrading euphemisms—buy it soon. *Before* your friends get a chance to play the tricks on you.

### THE ROSEANNE BARR SHOW ★★★

*Roseanne Barr, Bill Pentland. Directed by Rocco Urbisci. 1987. (HBO cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 57 min., \$39.95)*

By Maury Z. Levy

When she starts off the show in the kitchen with curlers, you know Roseanne Barr hasn't forgotten her roots. A few years ago, she was a joke-cracking housewife in Salt Lake City who decided to take a shot at the comedy Big Time. Now, she's a regular with Johnny Carson and the host of her own cable specials. This is one of them.

Self-proclaimed "America's favorite domestic goddess," Barr keeps her humor largely in her character—an intentionally overweight wise-ass gum-cracker who lives in a trailer hooked up to bad grammar. She plays it dumb, but through it all—even when she's stuffing her face full of Cheetos in the middle of the act—you know she's one smart cookie.

Some of her material rings of Henny Youngman. ("We honeymooned in Isit, Connecticut—at the Isit Inn.") But most of it is fresh and very domestic. ("Me and my husband just found this great new method of birth control. Every night before we go to bed we spend an hour with our kids.")

The husband and kids are part of this situation stand-up. But mostly it's Barr alone. And, for us, that's good and plenty.

### DORF AND THE FIRST GAMES OF MT. OLYMPUS ★

*Tim Conway, Vincent Schiavelli. Directed by Lang Elliot. 1988. (J2 cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 35 min., \$29.95)*

I like Tim Conway. Which makes it all the harder to tell you that Dorf is a one-trick pony. Those who saw *Dorfon Golf*, the prequel to this tragic comedy, probably got a few chuckles. Conway, even at his silliest, is worth that. But enough is enough.

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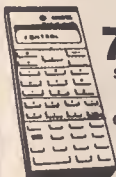
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


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merry midget. The place is Greece. The year is One. The laughs are zero. This is slapstick at its most base. It's one big short joke that could only be done on video (on live TV, his legs would cramp up too quickly). The premise? This little Swedish character in a toga (don't ask) discovers the Olympics and promptly gets hit in the head with his own shot-put ball, pole vaults into quicksand and hurdles over large rocks—catching his crotch on the last one. You see it coming a quarter-mile away.

Conway is assisted in this non-epic by Schiavelli who is the perfect counterpoint in at least one sense—he is very tall. But not the stuff big yucks are made of. The whole thing is silly, almost embarrassingly so. On *The Carol Burnett Show*, it would have been kept to a four-minute skit. Here they vamp and stretch and do bird-poop jokes for 35 minutes. It's really too bad. And it's really not funny. (M.Z.L.)

## THE ARTS

### THE BEGGAR'S OPERA ★★★★★

Roger Daltrey, Carol Hall, Rosemary Ashe, Patricia Routledge. English Baroque Soloists conducted by John Eliot Gardiner. Directed by Jonathan Miller. 1983. (Home Vision cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 135 min., \$49.95)

By Christie Barter

John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, first produced in London in 1728, was by all accounts the city's hottest theatrical property right from the start—far more popular with audiences of the time than the heroic operas of Handel, and often imitated on the English stage for years afterward. (Its best-known incarnation in modern times, of course, is the Weill-Brecht *Threepenny Opera*.)

The production here was mounted by the BBC in 1983. Running well over two hours, it offers virtually the complete work, including all 69 of the little ballads with which Gay dotted the action. Set in and around Newgate Prison and populated by the randy thieves and whores who infested London's low life at the time, *The Beggar's Opera* is indeed action packed, and director Jonathan Miller makes the most of it, warts and all.

Moreover, the performances he draws from his large cast of relatively unknown British singing actors could hardly be more forcefully rendered. Daltrey, former lead singer of the Who, is certainly familiar enough to rock fans, and he has just the right kind of rough-edged charm for the principal role of Macheath. The major supporting roles, too, are wonderfully projected and engagingly sung under Gardiner's vigorous and informed musical direction.

The camerawork is deft and the technical quality of the video transfer is excellent throughout. My only complaint is that, while the lyrics to the ballads and the spoken dialogue (and there's a lot of it) are in English, Gay was writing in the colloquial language of his day, and Home Vision would have done many of us a favor by enclosing a libretto.

## DOCUMENTARY

### EMPIRE OF THE RISING SUN, VOLS. 1 & 2 ★

Compiled by David T. Ichikawa. 1987. (Two Hollywood Select cassettes, Hi-Fi mono, 59 min. each, \$14.99 each)

By Bud Greenspan

I should have been forewarned by the opening credits of this two-hour documentary, released on two cassettes. The credits take one minute and 40 seconds. They let us know that Larry S. Fine and David T. Ichikawa present it, produced it and that Ichikawa not only compiled and edited it but also composed the title music. Repetitious credits of this sort may be acceptable for Orson Welles or Charles Chaplin, but for Fine and Ichikawa they are more of an embarrassment. But that's not the most embarrassing element of this video release.

*Empire of the Rising Sun* is obviously being released right now to cash in on the critical success of two superb feature films, *Empire of the Sun* and *The Last Emperor*, both set in the tumultuous years of Japan's moves into China in the 1930s. Whether or not interest in those events will spill over to this WWII-era documentary is debatable—especially considering its quality.

What we have here is a series of short subjects and newsreel clips from the period after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This material has been sloppily spliced together to give some sort of chronological progression to the alleged thousand-year policy of Japanese militarism. This takes up *Vol. 1*. Then *Vol. 2* follows with a patchwork, cut-and-paste job of newsreels and wartime shorts, climaxing with the peace-signing ceremony aboard the battleship *Missouri* at the end of the war.

The narration has not been changed from the original wartime soundtracks and one continually shudders as the narrators derisively refer to the "Nips" and the "Japs" in words that prove that US propagandists could be as vulgar and vicious during WWII as those of our enemies.

There is some historical value at the end of this cumbersome two hours. In hind-

VR reviewer Greenspan is also the writer-producer of the award-winning audio documentary December 7th, 1941.

sight, one wonders whether the famous shots of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's return to the Philippines were merely staged for the benefit of the newsreel cameras, for rather than looking heroic MacArthur appears more interested in not getting his trousers wet. Then there is a segment which unfortunately comes out of nowhere, offering the official US rationalization as to why loyal American citizens of Japanese heritage were sent off to relocation camps. It's embarrassing to hear this today.

We need an objective documentary on this subject on home video, but this isn't it. The pros and cons of Japanese-American relationships are far more complex than this outdated, one-sided hodgepodge.

## NOVA: EINSTEIN ★★ ★

Narrated by Richard Kiley. Written and produced by Patrick Griffith. 1982.

## NOVA: UFO's: ARE WE ALONE? ★★ ★

Narrated by Don Wescott. Written and produced by John Groom. 1982.

(Two Vestron cassettes, Hi-Fi mono, 60 min. each, \$29.98 each)

By Deirdre Condon

*Nova*, the venerable 14-year-old PBS science series, makes its debut on video with two of its ever-fascinating documentaries, though not two of its very best.

What's made *Nova* the best science series on television is its breadth of topics and its clear presentation of material. *Nova* has never been a series just for nerds or science buffs. No matter what the topic (and just about everything under and over the sun qualifies) *Nova* will hold your interest. Give it five minutes and you can't change the channel. Gotcha.

In a sense, science is what's missing from *Einstein*. This biography focuses more on the international celebrity and deeply committed pacifist than the scientist. Arthur I. Miller of Harvard makes brief appearances to explain Einstein's theories and his work, but I wanted more depth. That aside, the documentary nearly overpowers us with the complexity of a man too many of us usually dismiss as a wild-haired genius. In doing so, *Einstein* punctures the false stereo-type of the ivory tower academic.

*UFO's: Are We Alone?* suffers from timing. Nearly all the cases brought up here are logically and rationally debunked, though no doors are closed. One case, however, is strikingly similar to the account in Whitley Strieber's recent bestseller *Communion*, and as such the tape cries out for an update, either a voice-over or a title-card insert.

UFO believers won't like this tape, but those of us who've had our curiosity piqued by tales we've found difficult to dismiss out-of-hand appreciate the scientific approach to the subject as presented here.

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# KID VID

## KIDSONGS: THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SPORTS ★★★

Directed by Bruce Gowers. 1987.  
(View-Master cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 25 min., \$14.95)

By Elizabeth Crow

Children love to see kid performers, to hear other children singing. They are mesmerized by the sight of boys and girls like themselves acting and dancing and fooling around in front of a camera. The award-winning *KidSongs* series has taken this universal truth and developed it into a successful, entertaining, musical format that is to youngsters between the ages of two to six what rock videos are to high-school kids.

On this sports-centered video release, folk songs ("Over the River and Through the Trees"), cheers ("D-e-e-fense"), rock ("Bend Me, Shape Me") and golden oldies ("I Get Around") are sung by a kids-and-adults chorus and lip-synced by children who are shown performing gymnastics routines, riding horses, playing basketball and soccer, zipping around on go-carts and windsurfing.

The songs are charming, the smiling child performers only slightly saccharine, and some of the sports footage (especially the gymnastics shots) are riveting. This is pleasant, low-key entertainment for children which *won't* leave their parents begging for quiet.

## SEABERT: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS ★

Animated feature. Directed by Freddie Monnickendam, Joop Vicha. 1986.  
(Celebrity cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 90 min., \$29.95)

## SEABERT: THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES ★

Animated feature. Directed by Monnickendam, Vicha. 1987.  
(Celebrity cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 90 min., \$29.95)

Originally made for cable TV, *Seabert* is an unusual kids' cartoon series with a dog-good theme—saving baby seals from extinction at the hands of greedy profiteers. It also presents minorities in a positive light (one of the cartoon's two child heroes is Aura, a Greenland Eskimo). Unfortunately, however, *Seabert*—at least in these first two video releases—turns out to be as sexist, racist and unimaginatively violent in the telling of its stories as any other Saturday morning TV offering.

Consistently, Tommy, the white American visitor to Greenland, leads the way for Aura and her fellow Eskimos, when the

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reverse would more likely be true—especially since Tommy doesn't even have the sense to button up his jacket in this land of snow and ice! When Tommy wants Aura to join him, he simply shouts, "Aura! Come here!" and she docilely emerges to follow him on their adventures. So much for modern-day enlightenment.

Tommy and Aura do manage to save seals, again and again, with the assistance of their pet pal Seabert, the cuddly baby seal. But they succeed by using the same old tricks that the seals' archenemy, evil Graphite, and his murderous henchmen use: threats, violence and mayhem.

In reality, of course, ecologists who want to protect endangered species tend to be fairly gentle souls who use passive and non-violent means to obtain concessions and compromises from the groups and individuals who want to hunt these animals. But not according to these *Seabert* tapes! Here, force begets force—every time. Raging polar bears, acting on behalf of the baby seals, chase the villain until he's frozen into a solid block of ice. A mob of enraged Eskimos surround and subdue the hunters, using the threat of death to convince them to give up the hunt. Tommy and Aura ignite a trail of gasoline leading to the hunters' hideout, causing a gigantic explosion from which it's unlikely that anyone would emerge unscathed.

For all their environmentalist and minorities "window dressing," I find these first *Seabert* releases unpleasant examples of cartoon packaging, cynically exploiting parents' desire for cartoons with worthy content while delivering mostly nasty violence. (E.C.)

## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GUMBY ★★

*Animated featurette. 1956. (Family Home Entertainment cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 27 min., \$14.95)*

By Genevieve Kazdin

Gumby and Pokey are on the comeback trail, with Gumby toys available almost everywhere. Thirty years ago, Gumby's TV adventures seemed ingenious and funny in the then-new process of Claymation. Now, they're just a little dated stylistically. But for today's kids who haven't seen them before, these stories will surely have their moments.

This tape includes five brief 1956 episodes titled "Fred the Hemoglobin," "Outcast Marbles," "Tail Tale," "Haunted Hot Dog" and "The Indian Challenge." They are pleasant diversions—not special or exciting, but easy to watch. Sometime, however, I would like to see a few new Gumby adventures that are more than four or five minutes long. After all, the characters are endearing, the concepts are sound and the Claymation technique still fun to watch. □

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## Coming Next To Home Video: The Latest On Videotapes And Discs



East L.A.'s *Marin* chills out.

### COMEDY

**BORN IN EAST L.A.** (1987) An 85-minute extension of Cheech Marin's Springsteen parody, featuring a glorious finale set to Neil Diamond's "America." Rated R. (MCA, May 5)

**DOCTOR'S WIVES** (1970) Unbridled lust among the stethoscope and Amex-Gold set leads to murder and chicanery. With Dyan Cannon. (RCA/Columbia, April 26)

**HOBSON'S CHOICE** (1983) Sharon Gless cons a dowry from daddy Jack Warden in old New Orleans. (Playhouse, April 14)

**THE ROAD TO UTOPIA** (1946) Post-war inanity, with Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour. B&W. (MCA, May 5)



Looks like Utopia for Crosby, Lamour and (maybe) Hope.

**STUDENT CONFIDENTIAL** (1987) A millionaire/guidance-counselor cures teen angst. With Marlon Jackson, Eric Douglas. Rated R. (Media, April 27)

### ACTION

**THE CITY KILLER** (1987) Smiten and spurned by Heather Locklear, Terence Knox levels a skyscraper. You've never seen Gerald McRaney so ticked. (Prism, May 3)

**THE BLACK COBRA** (1987) Karl Snake Landgren, Fred The Hammer Williamson and Eva Who? Grimaldi play rock/scissors/paper with big guns. (TWE, April 14)

**DEADLY ILLUSION** (1987) Billy Dee Williams is a PI juggling Morgan Fairchild, Vanity, the cops and dead guys in Mets' hats. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia, April 26)

**DEATH WISH 4: THE CRACK-DOWN** (1987) Charles Bronson says no to L.A.'s drug lords. Rated R. (Media, April 5)

**THE KILLING TIME** (1987) A mysterious stranger arrives in a peaceful American hamlet. Beau Bridges, Kiefer Sutherland and Joe Don Baker trade worried looks. Rated R. (New World, April 26)

**LONE RUNNER** (1987) Beefy Miles O'Keefe (Bo Derek's *Tarzan*) plays variations on the strange-masked-man theme in the Arabian desert. Rated PG. (Media, April 27)

### SCI FI

**DEEP SPACE** (1987) Murderous alien arrives from titular locale. Sows the pods o' death. *Barney Miller* adjunct Ron Glass buys it big time. Rated R. (TWE, April 14)

**THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN** (1957) Diminished by radioactive fog to two inches tall, Grant

Williams fends off cats and bugs. B&W. (MCA, May 5)

**STARSLAMMER** (1987) Women-in-space prison. (Vidmark, May 11)

### DRAMA

**BACH & BROCCOLI** (1986) Little orphan girl moves in with uncle, brings pet skunk (Broccoli), waylays uncle's organ (Bach) practice. Love, duty and compromise prevail. (Family, May 5)

**THE CASTLE** (1968) A Kafkaesque adaptation of Kafka's Kafkaesque novel. Castle owners hire K. (Maximilian Schell)—but refuse him entrance. (Palisades, May 4)



A moment of Hope and Glory.

**DEAD RECKONING** (1947) Somebody iced Johnny. And that blonde over at Martinelli's place knows more than she's telling. Humphrey Bogart and Elizabeth Scott in B&W. (RCA/Columbia, April 26)

**THE HITTER** (1986) Adolph Caesar tries to mold a bum prize-fighter (Ron O'Neal) into a contender. Rated R. (Sony, April 25)

**HOPE AND GLORY** (1987) John Boorman's memoir of London during the Blitz, as viewed by a seven-year-old boy. With Sebastian Rice Edwards, Sarah Miles. Rated PG-13. (Nelson, May 25)

**THE MAN FROM LARAMIE** (1955) James Stewart pursues frontier justice in dangerous New Mexico. Well, it was dangerous then. (RCA/Columbia, April 26)

**SCENES FROM THE GOLDMINE** (1987) Catherine Mary Stewart gets tangled in the backstabbing record-biz ropes. With Steve Railsback, flannel-rock (ex-Poco) bassist Timothy B. Schmit and "Nights Are Forever" inflicter John Ford Coley. Rated R. (Charter April 27)

**SUCCESS IS THE BEST REVENGE** (1985) When voodoo fails. An exiled Polish director (Michael York) painfully cuts ties with his homeland. Directed by Jerzy Skolimowski. With John Hurt. (Magnum, April 14)

**THE WHALES OF AUGUST** (1987) Hoary whimsy and time-honed sibling rivalry peak at the Maine summer home of two widowed sisters (Bette Davis, Lillian Gish). (Nelson, May 4)

### FOREIGN LANGUAGE

**BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOR** (1975) WWI breaks out, inspiring French Africans to invade German Africans, using African Africans. A French comedy by Jean-Jacques Annaud. Rated PG. (Lorimar, April 5)

**FELLINI SATYRICON** (1969) Italy's flamboyant Federico Fellini examines the decay of Nero's Rome and its parallels to today. With English subtitles. Letterbox format. Rated R. (MGM/UA, April 19)



Gish and Davis check out Whales.

**MY LIFE AS A DOG** (1987) An English-language version of Swede Lasse Hallstrom's touching comedy, wherein a young lad idolizes one of Russia's canine cosmonauts. (Paramount, April 20)

**GOP BASHING MILLHOUSE: A WHITE COMEDY** (1972) A compilation of misspeakings and out-of-context embarrassments from Richard M. Nixon's political career. (MPI, April 20)

**ROCKIN' RONNIE** (1987) President Ronald Reagan, at his outtake and blooper-spouting worst—for the delight of friends and foes. (MPI, April 20)

**APPRENTICE TO MURDER** (1988) There's much ado about Satan in this Pennsylvania Dutch community as Donald Sutherland channels the bizarre. With Chad Lowe, Mia Sara. Rated PG-13. (*New World*, April 26)

**RETURNS** (1988) Gore aplenty in an urban high-rise, compliments of producer Dario Argento. Rated R. (*Imperial, April 20*)



HOLLYWOOD CHAINSAW

**HOLLYWOOD CHAINSAW HOOKERS** (1988) They worship Homelites and kill. With nudity, graphic violence, Gunnar Hansen, Linnea Quigley. (*Camp, April 12*)

**THE OFFSPRING** (1987) Oldfield, Tennessee's town historian (Vincent Price) spins spooky tales. With Clu Gulager. Rated R. (*IVE*, May 5)

**THE OUTING** (1987) A malicious museum mummy menaces teens on a nocturnal trespass. Rated R. (IVE, May 5)

**PRISON** (1988) Falsely executed convict returns to haunt his executioner. Undead fury abounds. (*New World*, April 26)

**ANDY WARHOL MOVIES** Three Warhol-produced charmers, entitled *Flesh* (1968), *Heat* (1972) and *Trash* (1970). All directed by Paul Morrissey. All with Joe Dallesandro. Adult-oriented material. (*Paramount*, April 20)

**GEORGE STRAIT LIVE (1987)**  
The hunky country boy whips Dallas ladies into a sexual frenzy with 16 hits. (MCA, May 5)

**SHOUT! THE STORY OF JOHNNY O'KEEFE** (1983) This Australian legend broke ground for the Bee Gees, Air Supply, Olivia Newton John and Peter Allen. Shout *what?* (Fries, May 31)

**SIGN O' THE TIMES** (1988)  
Prince—master musician, top pop



*A hot jam in Prince's Sign O' the Times.*

composer and slithery corrupter of youth—recorded in Europe. Rated PG-13. (MCA May 5)

**LITTLE PEOPLE VIDEO (1988)**  
Video stories with the popular Fisher-Price characters. The first two tapes are *Favorite Songs* and *Three Favorite Stories*. Read-along booklets included. (New World, April 5)

**PEE-WEE'S PLAYHOUSE (1986)** Programs selected from Herman's Saturday morning art-damage sessions. Three tapes are available. (*Hip-Tops*, April 12)

**STORYTIME MUSICAL TREASURY** (1988) Three new classical music videos for children, including half-hour versions of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, and Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*. (J2, May 2)

**FROG** (1987) Teen nerd (Scott Grimes) with a passion for reptiles makes a deal with the frog prince (Paul Williams). From the PBS *Wonderworks* series. (Orion, April 28)

**LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY**  
(1936) A nice boy from Brooklyn softens a cranky English Earl's (C. Aubrey Smith) disposition. (Playhouse, April 14)

**BOBBY RIGGS: AGELESS TENNIS** (1988) The erstwhile King nemeses proves that you're never too old to ace. (*Academy, April 4*)

**THE CHARLENE PRICKETT FITNESS SERIES** (1988) The Lifetime cable denizen instructs in three programs: *No Jump, Hang in There!* and *Rev Up*. (J2, May 19)

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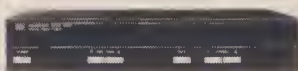
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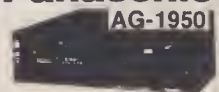
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## ...TIPS

*Continued from page 28*

as your video shoots become more ambitious.

In dramatic setups, you're going to need at least two light sources. The first, and main, source is the **key light**. This can be a simple lamp that appears on screen with your actors or an off-camera light that's tilted down toward the scene. The second light is the **fill light**, so called because it fills in the pockets that are left unilluminated by the key light. A video lamp that attaches to the shoehorn section at the top of your camcorder will serve this purpose well.

In shooting video, you want to avoid shining too much light directly into the camcorder lens, unless you're shooting your subjects in profile and desire a silhouette effect. If you're in a situation where there's too much backlighting and there's no way around it, use the fill light to compensate. Adjusting the iris of your camcorder also helps here.

## FOLLOWING THE MUSE

We've talked about the director being "in control," and this is, more or less, the case. But even Hollywood directors don't have complete control over their material. Studio executives, budget problems, demographic considerations—all these things can throw monkey wrenches into a director's vision. "It's practically impossible to get complete control of your work in this town," says David Lynch, the visionary director of *Blue Velvet* and *Eraserhead*. "I'm going to be doing a picture, *Ronnie Rocket*, for Geffen, and the only reason I'm doing it for them is because they promised me control over it."

While a home videographer doesn't necessarily have all the technical tools of a major director at his disposal, he does have one thing any *auteur* would kill for—complete creative freedom. John Cassavetes had to save up a substantial amount of money before he directed his first movie, *Shadows*. Self-financing allowed him all the freedom he wanted. "I had never done anything as a director before," Cassavetes recalls. "I think we made all the mistakes that can be made. But that's how we learned what moviemaking is all about. Shooting your own home productions can be a lot like this. So if you want to shoot for three hours, you do it. If you don't like what you've just shot, go shoot for five hours or 10 hours or two days and so on, if you've got the energy."

Philippe Mora, director of *Howling III* and the forthcoming movie version of Whitley Strieber's *Communion*, concurs. "The advantage of video over film," he says, "is that you can shoot an enormous amount of footage for very little money. Try different things. Shoot from various angles. The ease with which you can shoot on video will take a lot of the mumbo jumbo out of filmmaking."

If you've got something you want to convey, you'll end up conveying it no matter how long it takes. David Lynch spent five years just shooting *Eraserhead*; when the money ran out, production stopped until he raised some more. "When you get an idea, you really want it to happen right away," Lynch says. "And it can be very frustrating when it doesn't. But sometimes you just have to wait." With a camcorder, there's often no waiting required: You get an idea, you round up your friends and you go for it. The more you shoot, the closer you get to realizing your own personal style.

Of course, personal style does not an artist make, and just because you're capable of being expressive with your camcorder doesn't mean you'll hook your audience. "Don't quit your day job," Dennis Hopper advised when we asked him what he had to say to home video directors. In a more helpful vein, he suggests that the camcorder *auteur* "try to get girls to take off their clothes. 'cause if you can take pictures while some girl's standing there naked, you're a great director." To which we can only add, don't try this at home.

One thing's certain: In creativity, there is no right or wrong. "The most important thing I have learned about making a movie," Albert Brooks said after he directed *Lost in America*, "is to be sure and listen to the inner voice. It's a very complicated process to make a movie. I have to keep reminding myself why I'm doing all of this." While video moviemaking is not nearly as complicated, listening to the inner voice is important there, too. It helps you take any technical lessons you've learned and incorporate them into a creative idea—and that makes the difference between a technically competent video production and an inspired one. □

## ...SUPERMAN

*Continued from page 35*

and profitable run in syndication in the '60s and beyond. Eight of these TV episodes have recently been released on video by Warner.

In the late '70s, the father-and-son producer team of Alexander and Ilya Salkind decided the time was right for a supermovie production of Superman. After initially approaching several major stars for the lead, the Salkinds decided to cast an unknown, and young stage actor Christopher Reeve got the role. Still in need of big boxoffice names the Salkinds secured the services of Marlon Brando to play Jor-El, Superman's natural father. Gene Hackman signed on to play Lex Luthor, Superman's old foe, who came off as something of a zany according to the script. Margot Kidder took the Lois Lane role, bringing a feistiness to the part that rivaled Phyllis Coates.

By the time *Superman—The Movie* finally made it to the silver screen in 1978, over \$30 million had been spent. Fortunately, most of it showed up on-screen. The Krypton settings were elaborate and properly otherworldly, location shooting in New York was well blended with studio shots done in England, and the special effects were first-rate.

There was initial fear that the script—worked on by Mario Puzo, David and Leslie Newman and Robert Benton—would be a patchwork of conflicting moods and fragmented scenes. Amazingly enough, director Richard Donner pulled the disparate elements into a cohesive whole. The stateliness of the Krypton sequences was balanced by the understated lyricism of the Smallville sequences. The fast and funny Metropolis scenes depicted fledgling reporter Kent as a seriocomic figure who was the butt of visual and verbal jokes—

until he took off his business suit. The heavies of the piece, represented by Hackman, bumbling henchman Ned Beatty and airhead sex kitten Valerie Perrine, provided welcome humor that bordered on high camp.

Critics were mixed about the \$30-million *Superman—The Movie*, but it was a huge hit. So, too, was the video release (by Warner). Cannily, the Salkinds had filmed more than could be used in one feature movie—so they were able to follow it with 1980's *Superman II* with a minimum of reshooting, plus the renegotiation of several star contracts to reflect additional payment for a second, separate movie (also released on video by Warner). The success of *Superman II* led to 1983's *Superman III*, an ill-conceived attempt to combine the Man of Steel's renewed popularity with that of comedian Richard Pryor. The resultant fiasco, while not without its moments of

charm, fared poorly with audiences. (It, too, is a Warner video release.)

Reeve publicly announced he would never again play the role. But, spurred on by a desire to make a "meaningful" Superman movie, he elected to don the red-and-blue costume one more time for *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*. But the movie received scathing reviews and disappeared after a short run. (It was released on video by Warner just before Christmas.)

Through feature movies, serials, cartoons and a TV series, the Man of Steel is now a firmly rooted fixture of Americana. His adventures, adapted for changing times, will likely continue to be a standard for heroics above and beyond the scope or abilities of normal beings. In an era when the good guys are sometimes difficult to separate from the bad guys, Superman still represents truth, justice and the American Way. □

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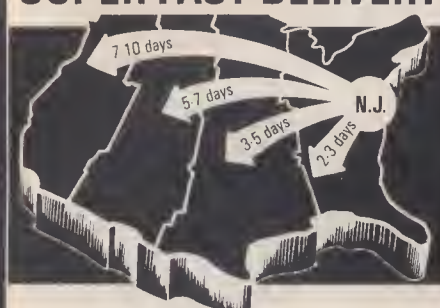


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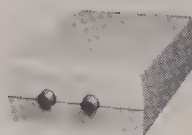
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# Video Review

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## Special Deliveries: The Letters We Didn't Print

In this space, *Video Review* regularly invites a guest columnist to stand on a soapbox and discuss the state of home video and sundry topics. And 12 times a year in the "Letters" pages, we invite our readers to do the same. Most comment with eloquence, understanding and pungent wit. Others have a different way of expressing themselves. This month's "Backspace" is devoted to those correspondents who prompt us to wonder whether they are reading the same magazine—or tempt us to call the authorities. So keep those cards and letters coming—but, please, not in purple crayon.

### NOT IN A FAMILY MAGAZINE

You had an article on Errol Flynn in your November issue. Wasn't there a prank played on him using actor John Barrymore's body? Do you have any info on this that you would care to print?

### WE MISSED IT TOO

I missed the issue that gave the address for the Bert Convy Perpetual Adoration Association. Please send me the address. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for this purpose.

### LOST IN TRANSLATION: WEST GERMANY

from January i a subscriber to your magazin.

Please i have a request.

To your for me following letter.

Hello american Videofrends, i wish contact to american VHS-Videofans.

Please we writing me and send me a List of your Videocassettes.

### THANKS, BUT YOU CAN HOLD OFF ON THAT RESUME

I would like to bring your special attention to an important video issue. That is your *Video Review's* 200 Best Movies on Video. The comments of these so-called top critics is of no interest at all to any intelligent person. I do not know of one person that pays any attention to them. Their judgments are not only often wrong, but foolish as well.

In the event that you are interested in which sampling sector I belong to, I have a B.S.C. in physics. I suggest that you offer reports on the facts of the plot of the movie and the characterizations, directors, writers, cost of production, cost for special effects, actors, time and location of filming, along with any other tidbits of factual information.

### DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO

[We] would love *Back to the Future*, *E.T.*, *Teen Wolf*, *A Christmas Story*, but they were tainted with sex and language. Also take out some of that ear-splitting rock crap.

### ...LATER THAT SAME LETTER

Our children are suffering from all the sex, violence and bad

language. Example—A friend of mine said her little boy came into the room and said an ugly word. She spanked the child, and the child turned and said, "I'll kill the fool that spans me."

Mr. T was banned from the home, in cartoon and on *The A-Team*.

### THOSE WHO CAN'T SPELL, TEACH

To your list of faces we would rather not watch in '87. As if we had a choice please add sleezbags Oliver North and John Poin-dexter to the list.

My students are geting the North Poindexter Syndrom, They would like to answer my questions but they are not going to at this time.

### LOST IN TRANSLATION: MISSISSIPPI

I like too, have this one.  
Bill me—Puss in Boots.

### THAT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD, BUT WHERE'S YOUR 'FREEZE- FRAME' IDEA?

I have a video and am interested in better quality videos.  
Send info and a free T-shirt.

**FUNNY, WE THOUGHT  
BERT CONVY WAS KING  
VAMPIRES (AKA CENSOR-  
SHIP)** is taking over! VAM-PIRES are draining blood from many otherwise enjoyable programs. In today's Television, the VAMPIRE IS KING! His Horrible Legacy:

1. Cop Shows without shooting or lessons learned.
2. Doctor Shows without operations or dying.
3. Westerns without Cowboys.

### ...LATER THAT SAME LETTER

This reminds me of the story of the boy standing still while someone smashed him in the face, over and over again, and what the boy finally said: "OK, I think I've had enough now."

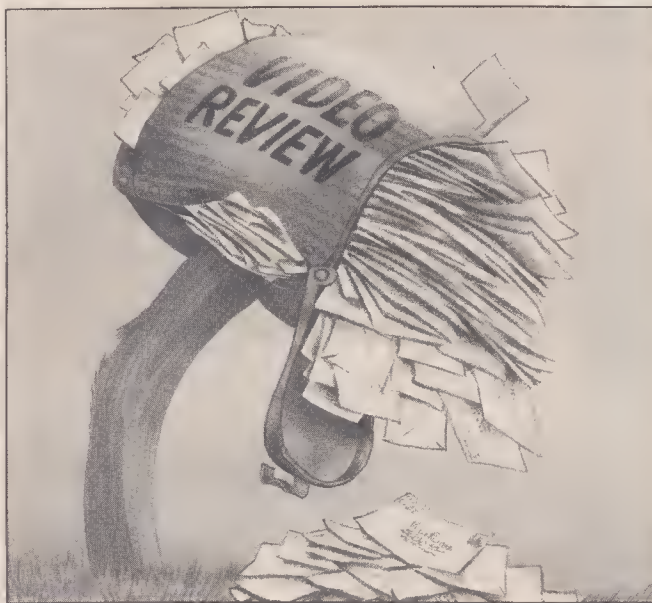
### LOST IN TRANSLATION: THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Ever since I saw the movie, *The Last Picture Show*, with my brother-in-law's half brother, in Houston, Texas, during mid-'43-'45, I've been trying to find out if they had ever made it into a VHS videocassette movie too!

### UH-HUH

In the movie *Somewhere in Time*, Christopher Reeve is handed a pocket watch by an elderly woman. Later, he goes back in time and presents this same watch to the woman in her youth.

This watch is never purchased, made, stolen or lost. By writing this paradox, the creator of the script has broken a few extra laws of nature. The writer does not understand that the watch only exists in between the two time events mentioned, not before and not after. If this were the case, matter could be both created and destroyed. □



# WAR IS HELL. BUT OCCASIONALLY IT'S KIND OF NIFTY.

**5 ACADEMY AWARD  
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OF A WORLD AT WAR.  
AND A BOY AT PLAY.**

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PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13  
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**A**ir raids. Bombings. A nation at war.

Even then, Bill knew it was the best time he'd ever have.

Acclaimed director John Boorman ("The Emerald Forest," "Excalibur") brings us his most critically admired film yet; mankind's greatest conflict, as seen through the eyes of a seven year old.

Sarah Miles ("The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea") stars as Bill's ever-tolerant mother, who does her best while dad's at war. But when your street's in rubble, the school's ablaze and the Luftwaffe is parachuting into your backyard, one tends to be a lot more lenient.

The L.A. Film Critics awarded it Best Picture, Best Director and Best Screenplay. And its hugely successful theatrical release shows the audience agreed.

*Hope and Glory.*

The epic saga of a world at war.  
And a boy at play.



Available on videocassette May 25, 1988.

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For additional information, circle No. 6 on Reader Service Card.

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